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A TROUT ANGLER'S NOTEBOOK

By H. S. Joyce

BY FIELD AND STREAM

HOLIDAY TROUT FISHING

I WAS BORN IN THE COUNTRY

A COUNTRYMAN'S NOTEBOOK

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"He was a perfect picture!"

A TROUT ANGLER'S NOTEBOOK

By

H. S. JOYCE

With Illustrations by the Author

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It is almost unavoidable in republishing articles which have appeared over a period of years that a few repetitions should occur ; but perhaps such may be regarded merely as emphasis on points which I consider of major importance.

H. S. J.

711503

Bretnell 1/24

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A TROUT ANGLER'S NOTEBOOK

CHAPTER I

BROOKS

1. *A Mere Ditch*

A GOOD horse could have jumped it anywhere. Most of it was a typical meadow ditch—water about a foot deep, the banks straight, and the course kept clear of weeds. Just at one or two points were bends where deeper pools had been washed out, and a few cattle bridges gave shelter to possible fish.

It was a good many years ago when I first made its acquaintance and, on my suggestion to my new-found friend, the farmer, that I should fish it, I was told that I was very welcome to do so ; but that I should get nothing more than a few eels.

One night, whilst fishing for eels, I saw a rise against some rushes and came back with the proposal that I should fish there for trout. The suggestion was laughed at, but I can stand a good deal of that ; so I brought out my rod and, after a good deal of creeping and crawling, casting and dapping in every likely-looking spot, I came back with a nice half-pounder.

Since then I have fished it many times and once had three trout as the result of a day's attention to the half-mile or so of water that came within the bounds of my friend's farm.

Years later I went into Devonshire for a short holiday for the purpose of looking up old friends and places, in which category were included my farmer friend and his ditch. Of course I had my rod with me and one evening he suggested that we should walk down the meadows and try for a trout.

The stream is not really suitable for fly fishing, as the very few places where fish lie are either quite unapproachable by this method, on account of bushes, etc., or too narrow to allow of casting without running great risk of being hung up on brambles or bushes, when an approach to free the tackle, of course, puts that spot quite out of action for some time. When I first started fishing the place, I always used the fly and found that I could sometimes get a fish or two by dapping; but further experience proved to me that the best method was by spinning with an artificial minnow. I fished with a small Devon minnow on this occasion and the result was one fish just under half a pound.

The following morning sheep shearing was in progress at the farm, so I was left to my own devices. I took up my rod and went straight to the little cattle bridge where we had left off on the previous evening. This little bridge is a tricky place to fish with a minnow, as the arch is little more than two feet wide and the highest point not more than eighteen inches above the water. To get the minnow well into the arch it is difficult to avoid slinging it against the brickwork, and the resulting splash into the water as it rebounds off the wall of course puts down every fish. I went to work very carefully with the preliminary swings before letting the minnow fly to the end of its course; in fact I stopped and started again three or four times before I was quite satisfied that the pull and timing was just what I wanted; then I let the minnow go and saw it shoot away out of sight and fall with scarcely a sound. It was exactly what I had wanted. I spun it up through the arch and along the stream for a few yards, in case a fish should be following, keeping well back out of sight myself. Nothing happened. Again I went through the careful performance of swinging the minnow until I was quite satisfied that it would go well down under the arch when released and enter the water almost silently. At last I let it go and heard the faint plop as it fell well out of sight; then I commenced bringing it along close to the wall and into the stream above. It had travelled about a foot outside the arch when I felt the strike. There was a momentary pause and then a determined, steady run back under the bridge. My

first impression was that I had hooked a small pike, though I had never heard of any having been seen there. I could feel my fish boring into the wall as if working for some hold, so I put some pressure on him and brought him up. He responded rather sulkily, but followed on right past me and well up the middle of the ditch. When he had gone several yards above me I peeped cautiously over the bank to see what sort of a creature it was that I was fighting. Imagine my surprise at seeing a trout nearly two feet long!

"Well," I said to myself, "you've got nearly a hundred yards of straight water above you and you can go up there to the end if you like; that is quite the safest part of the stream for you to be in at this juncture and from my point of view." So I gave him his head and let him swim steadily on upstream.

But I suppose the fish thought the country a little too exposed in that direction, for he turned about and came downstream again towards me after he had travelled scarcely a fifth of the distance.

Then he spotted me.

Like a flash he darted away upstream, leaving a cloud of disturbed mud behind him. Then, realizing that he was running away from home, he turned again and passed me like a racing hare. I had, of course, followed him up during his first run and was now well above the archway. To get in my slack line before he reached the arch I had to dash upstream, reeling in as I went. My chief fear was that he would go right down through the arch and out the other side, and then perhaps get the line round a stake in the little pool below.

Not wishing to keep all the fun to myself, and fearing also that I might find some difficulty eventually in landing the fish single-handed, I started to yell at the top of my voice. But my friend at the farm was working too close to the engine to hear anything outside, so I had to continue the battle alone.

At last the great fish began to turn over and I felt that the time had come for the use of the net, so I reached down the steep bank and essayed to pass it over his tail.

But here was another difficulty—the net was not deep enough to hold the fish!

The action of putting the net near him, of course, started the fight again; but it gave me time to think out a different plan of action.

Next time he turned over I knew it would mean that he would lie perfectly quiet for at least half a minute.

No sooner did he begin to roll than I turned his head downstream, put the net in front of him, brought the rod well over and upstream with my left hand—so as to bring the gut trace almost into line with the back of the fish, and so prevent possible fouling—and at the same time, in one movement, swept the net over his head and swung him out on to the grass.

He was a perfect picture! A small, neat head, high shoulders and thick back; a beautiful mouth, with small white and sharp teeth. Nothing whatever of the cannibal about him and probably quite a young fish. His back was dark olive, sides purple and gold, and gill covers gold, blue and green. A dozen red spots on either side towards the tail, and the usual dark spots about the head, shoulders and sides of the face. And he weighed four pounds all but two ounces.

I have set him up myself, and very handsome he looks. Of course, one can see the touch of the amateur about it; but at any rate I have given him the pale gold to his eye that he had in life, and so have gone one better than a good deal of the work that I have seen of professionals, who persist in sending out mounted trout with uncoloured eyes. I suppose I have caught something between five and ten thousand trout in my lifetime, and I have never yet seen one that had not some colour around the pupil of the eye.

But the point of all this is not to record that I have caught a trout that will for ever bring back to me a bit of country and friends that are dear to me; but to bid you not despise the seemingly insignificant field drains and small brooks. Many a "mere ditch" has given me good fish ere this, though certainly none has hitherto produced quite such a beauty as now rests above my mantelpiece and never fails to resurrect

the tense excitement of those moments when he struggled with me for his life beside that cattle arch in a Devonshire meadow.

2. *The Charm of the Brook*

The late Garrow Green sang the praises of trouting in brooks perhaps more eloquently than any other. I do not know if it is the coincidence that I used always to spend a part at any rate of my holidays in the same " digs " in Cornwall that Green used to visit that has influenced me in my fancy; but the fact remains that I am always glad of an opportunity of doing a little trouting in a genuine brook.

By a " brook " I mean a stream that is definitely within the jumping powers of a good horse. I prefer that it should even be within the jumping powers of a man. Anything larger I class as a " small stream," until it reaches the river class in size. Small streams require much the same tactics as rivers, and so do not, in my opinion, come within the category of brooks; the latter demand methods peculiar to themselves, and therein rests a large part of their charm.

Brooks are not, of course, places in which one may fish regularly. Too persistent angling very soon reduces the trout in a brook to such a fine margin as to render fishing there, without a considerable interval of rest, a waste of time and energy. Fish food, however, is usually plentiful, so th vacancies among the trout are generally quickly filled. parson friend once told me that he took four trout of the two pounds each at intervals of about a fortnight from same pool in a small brook that ran through the vicar meadow; the pool was no bigger round than the circum of an open umbrella. I have never endeavoured to friend's record, since I never fish the same brook mo about once in the same month; but I have had a n remarkably fine trout from remarkably small pools.

Garrow Green was a great believer in the worm. not despise it, but I happen to prefer to take my fish by methods, and I can usually show as good results as the wo

should he and I happen to be fishing the same water together. I am not denying that there is a great amount of skill required in worming, and, because I have not paid quite so much attention to this form of trouting, I must admit to being a very poor performer at the game.

Approach is a point of considerable importance in any style of trout fishing. In brook fishing it is quite definitely of major importance. Many brooks have extremely boggy banks, whereon it is almost impossible to walk without sending warning vibrations to the waters beneath. The sky-line also is quite a different proposition on a brook from what it is on a normal stream. In larger waters you keep low and use a longer line. In a brook a long line is impossible, and even an absolutely prone position on the bank is often too conspicuous. There is a small pool under a sluice on one of my favourite brooks. It is overhung with bushes on every side. On one side is a steep bank and on the other the ground slopes gradually from the meadow to a gravel bed where the cows have pushed their way through the bushes to drink. There is only one spot from which the pool can be fished successfully. Some would fish from above, where the water foams and gurgles from under the sluice; others would approach it by the cows' entrance. In the first method the angler is spotted at once, because, though the bushes are thick, every movement shows against the sky through the penings in the branches above. In the second method, the lk of the angler blocking the only opening through which light can come to that part of the pool casts a gloom over ce and immediately warns the inmates of his approach. rect method is to cross the stream at least ten yards the pool, creep stealthily along under the bushes and m the tail stickle with your back right up against the y bank. In other cases one often has to take e of particular clumps of herbage; one season a ant enabled my young son and myself each to take out from a very exposed but otherwise favourable n the brook we were then fishing. In ordinary-sized one fishes upstream as a matter of course, except when ater is too full or the wind and light too definitely adverse

to permit doing so; it is the direction of the flow of the stream that one first thinks of. In fishing a brook it is the position of the sun that one must first take into consideration. One has to be so close to the fish that, except at midday, a shadow must always reach the water, unless one is actually facing the sun. Even when there is no sun, the same thing applies, though perhaps to a lesser extent; for obstruction of light is at once noticeable to a fish living in such a confined area that every fraction of an inch of that area must be as well known to the inhabitants as one knows the back of one's hand. I am always glad when I observe that cows have been in a meadow bordering a brook for some time; I know then that I have only to move at the same slow pace of a feeding cow and to adopt a stooping attitude to be able to walk right to the edge without causing alarm to the trout below; but then I must be careful to keep the rod very low, so that no part of it may appear against the sky. In a river the fly always travels with the stream and a drag is fatal. In a brook it sometimes happens that the most deadly way of working the fly is to drag it upstream, particularly if one can so manipulate it that it drags along the surface in short jumps close under the bank. Here one is representing an insect that has fallen in and, finding itself being carried down by the current, endeavours to regain its former position by skittering along the surface. One has to ring the changes on many methods; in one place dappling will prove most effective; in another the fly may be floated; in yet another it must be tripped upstream.

I have three favourite flies for brook fishing. Chief of these is a rather long-hackled, sparce Coch-y-bondhu. This is a very handy fly, as it can be made to represent a variety of insects by the method of its manipulation and makes an excellent spider when dapped over bushes. In dapping in imitation of a spider the fly should be lowered slowly and somewhat jerkily to within a few inches of the water, then drawn up again slowly and suddenly dropped a couple of inches, and so on. This movement represents the spider crawling up his thread and occasionally slipping down, as spiders frequently do. Any trout that happens to be near

will soon put in an appearance and can be watched through the leaves moving about excitedly beneath the spider in readiness for a longer slip that shall bring it within reach. It generally pays to keep the trout waiting a few seconds before letting him take the spider; he is thereby made more eager and reckless. My other brook flies are the Blue Upright and Black Gnat, the latter not too small. The Black Gnat is extremely useful on hot, sunny days and may then be dapped, floated, dragged and dropped, as the particular locality demands.

Minnow fishing in brooks also requires a method very different from that employed in larger waters. Light-weight minnows are absolutely essential; but a spare heavy one should always be carried for use in the very broken water where the light one would only bounce along the surface. Long casting is impossible and any sort of splash must be avoided at all costs. The minnow must be gently swung out and *lowered* into the water at the desired spot. To do this correctly it is necessary that the rod should have the pull of the weight of the minnow (and no more) evenly throughout the whole movement, so that the minnow is, as it were, "placed" in the water, not "dropped," as is the case when it is cast in the usual manner. This operation requires considerable practice, but when brought to perfection is a most deadly method of fishing. The management of the rod and line differs according to the spot being fished. In one place, because of obstructions, the rod must be held motionless and the line recovered by hand; in another it is better to draw the minnow along by moving the rod.

A short rod is necessary. My own measures eight feet, and I frequently find it too long. The cast should not be more than four feet; often I use one of only three feet. And the line should be relatively heavy; it is obvious that, in order to throw a fly, there must be some weight to bring the action of the rod into play. A gut cast will never bring this about; some weight of line is absolutely essential and, if the length of line required to get the fly into the desired position is only a matter of a foot or two, it must also be obvious that the line must be heavier than when several yards of it can

be used to bring about the desired pull. I have so often met anglers in despair because they were unable to cast their fly with any hope of success on the small water they happened to be fishing, and who seemed quite surprised when I suggested that they should remove their three-yard cast and substitute the odd yard of a broken cast that they had put away in their cast-book for use in an emergency. Then I have shown them the length of cast I have been using and they have realized that the emergency for which the broken end had been put away had indeed arrived.

In approaching the water it might be as well to study the actions of the heron. The heron, having alighted a few yards from the water, looks cautiously around for enemies. It may at times be necessary for the angler to look around first for enemies in the shape of male specimens of domestic cattle; such beasts can prove very disconcerting! But he should always examine the immediate neighbourhood carefully in order to ascertain the exact whereabouts of all trees and bushes, with a view to avoiding them with his tackle and accepting what protection they can give him against that always treacherous sky-line. The heron, having satisfied himself on the score of safety, proceeds with careful, creeping footsteps towards the water. The angler should do likewise, and, as he proceeds, examine every glint of water disclosed through the herbage in an endeavour to spot the trout before the trout spots him. Should the angler win this move of the game, he will probably win the deciding one later on if he carries it out with ordinary dexterity. But if the trout spots him first the incautious angler might just as well stand up at once and relieve his cramped limbs, for it is most unlikely that the fish will make any attempt to attack his proffered lure.

I find it an advantage to confine my attention to a very short stretch of water, if the stretch is reasonably fishable. A couple of hundred yards have frequently given me a long day's fishing. One's movements have to be so extremely cautious that one travels literally a foot at a time. At this slow pace, assuming that the whole stretch of water contains fish, the two hundred yards takes several hours to cover.

During this time one will certainly have missed several fish and scared away others through faulty approaches, so that by the time one has reached the end of the stretch the fish one missed or disturbed earlier in the day will have recovered from the shock and will be waiting to give one an opportunity of improving on one's mistakes. Should any declare that such a limited stretch affords insufficient exercise for an able-bodied man, let him, as I did a few years ago, tackle such a length on a broiling August day amongst herbage mostly four feet high, and he will find that, long ere the day is done, he will be glad to crawl back from the water and stretch his aching limbs every half-hour at least. I have many times finished such a day more fatigued than I should have been had I spent a similar length of time digging heavy ground in the garden.

3. *A Question of Technique*

I am now the happy owner, as tenant, of a stretch of private trout fishing. Not only does the fishing itself afford me a great deal of pleasure, but I have also the added pleasure of being able to invite a friend occasionally to join me on it. The stretch is nothing much to write home about—merely about half a mile on one bank of a little stream, almost jumpable in places, with very few really nice pools and with a great deal of swift, shallow water that only holds fingerlings. But it is the type of fishing I like and carries my mind back more than thirty years to the water I learnt on, after having spent the earlier years of my angling life on a coarse fish river.

After my first preliminary efforts I started trout fishing seriously on well-fished Association water and soon found that, after the end of May, if you wanted to get a decent fish, you had to ignore the open places, where there was plenty of room behind and nothing particular in front, and concentrate on the difficult spots where a fly could only be got out by flipping it, back-handed, forehanded, or by a quick circular movement of the rod-top. My water is nearly all of the latter type.

I had a friend down for the Whitsun week-end, a very good

A LITTLE STREAM, ALMOST JUMPABLE IN PLACES

dry-fly man with whom I have fished for many years. I told him that he would be lucky to get anything above ten inches, but that anything he got between eight and ten inches would give him as much fun as a pound fish from the usual dry-fly waters. Unfortunately, in spite of all my efforts to put him into the right places, he did not get a sizeable fish. This was partly due to the fact that the trout were not rising, but also very largely due to a wrong technique on his part and to the fact that his outfit was really not quite suitable for this type of water. With his rather stiff rod and heavy line he could throw a fly ten times as far as was required on my little brook, but he found it very difficult to flip the fly into a little pit not ten feet from him.

There must be a great number of anglers who go for a trout-fishing holiday very fully provided, both in equipment and technique, for the more open stretches, but without anything suitable for the smaller and more bushed waters. Yet it is in these little brooks and small, tricky spots that the best trout may often be found, particularly after the first three months of the season. Many anglers must be in the same fix as I was in my early days. I had a three-piece rod of twelve feet. This would take a nine-foot cast and was excellent for the open stretches ; but both cast and rod were unsuitable for the small waters. I tried a four-foot cast, but found that the rod was far too long to enable me to use it in confined places. I could dap over bushes, but that was about all. Then I hit upon the idea of hiding the butt in the bushes, putting the reel in my pocket, and using the middle and top joint only. This answered very well, and whilst I was learning the art of creeping in under bushes and flicking the fly at trout that I could almost touch with my rod-top, I was well satisfied. But the smallness of the grip was rather uncomfortable ; it put practically all the strain of casting on to the fingers, instead of having the strength of the whole hand to use. I got over this by making a little butt about a foot in length. I could carry this comfortably in my bag or pocket, and I found that this, in some curious way, increased the flipping qualities of my shortened rod. This all happened a great many years ago, and since then I have provided myself with

a little eight-foot cane which is everything I could wish for on the small, overgrown waters, and serves my purpose very well when I happen to be fishing a river that really requires some casting to cover. But in spite of this I should still be quite prepared to go back to the two top joints of a longish rod, even without any short butt, should I find myself with a rod too long for the water I wished to fish.

But a short rod is not the only necessity for small waters. A short cast is equally essential. A four-foot cast and four feet of line between cast and rod-top is all that is required for fishing in bushed and narrow places. A six-foot cast will probably be too long, since, if the rod is eight feet in length, it is more than likely that you will find that you cannot have more than two feet of line beyond the rod-top. This is not enough, as it does not give sufficient weight to bring the rod properly into action; it is impossible to get the fly in under the bushes if you have to rely on the weight of the cast alone. I have seen a very old Devonshire angler hold the fly between his finger and thumb, pull hard on the rod-top, and then let the fly shoot out into the desired spot. This is a pretty trick, but I have never been able to acquire it, although I think it does away with the necessity for a very short cast. But I find that the short cast and a reasonable weight of line beyond the rod-top to help it enables me to practice quite a number of different flicks, my favourite being a kind of circular stroking action with the rod-top. The first stage of this flick is to throw the fly out underhand as nearly as possible in a straight line with the rod. The rod-top is kept quite close to the surface of the water, the fly drawn back a few inches in the opposite direction to which it is eventually to be cast, and then, in one continuous movement, the rod-top swings the fly over into the desired spot. With a little practice one soon gets to feel that the fly is only a continuation of the rod, and then the placing of it by a swing is not so very difficult. The usual backwards and forwards action is an abomination under such circumstances and usually ends (and very soon, too!) in the fly and cast being hung up in the bushes overhead.

Sometimes it takes one the best part of five minutes to get into a position to make the required cast; but this is not

by any means a waste of time. It is worth while taking trouble to get the rod right and the fly out on to the water in the right preliminary spot before casting over the probable lay of the fish. On open waters one makes several casts in five minutes, but one or two casts only must suffice for these little nooks; so it is just as well to take plenty of time in their preparation.

There is one spot on my little stretch that beat me for quite a long time. It is just above a little stone bridge, where the stream turns a sharp right-angle, striking a wall just before flowing under the arch. This wall is under the opposite bank and the trout lie within a couple of inches of it and take the flies as they sweep along its face. An oak tree upstream and an iron bar as a cattle-stop across the arch prevent any back cast in either direction. I have got the trick now by using an underhand swing to get the fly out into the stream, and then a circular twist of the rod-top to flick up against the wall.

Usually one doesn't have to bother much about the particular fly one uses in these small places. So long as it is about the right size and generally resembles a fly that may be out at that time of the year, that is all that is really necessary. The way in which the fly comes to the fish is of very much more importance than anything else. I rarely use more than about four varieties throughout the season, and for the greater part of the time am content with either a Half Stone or a Blue Upright. I only change my fly when I find that a number of rising fish refuse it, or when I lose it in a bush. A lot of valuable time can be wasted changing flies, and I am always more ready to blame my own lack of ability than the type of fly I am using. If for any reason I lose confidence in a fly, that particular specimen is scrapped and, when next I am having an evening fly-tying, the hook is undressed and made up into a pattern which may seem more likely to take my fancy. I have many times replied, when asked what fly I recommend at a particular time of the year, "The fly in which you have most confidence." It may sound absurd, but I am certain that a man does better with a fly which he himself likes than with one that may be said to be the one

which the trout are fancying, but in which the angler has little faith. Sometimes it is not the type of fly that brings it into my bad books, but merely the style of dressing of one particular fly—too much or too little hackle ; too long or too short in the hackle fibres ; or some other detail.

Four or five trout averaging nine inches constitutes a good afternoon's or evening's basket on my little stream, and catching them gives delightful occupation for two or three hours. Could anyone ask more ? One might hammer the water for a whole day and double that number, but I prefer to spread my pleasures over the longest possible length of time.

4. *Pleasures in Miniature*

Nothing refreshes me so much as a few hours' trout-fishing, and though I have no objection to fishing in a large river when the opportunity occurs, I really prefer creeping about beside a small stream, seeking out each individual fish and gaining them more by skill in field craft than by dexterity in casting. To reach the best of my available water I have to cycle nine miles, and this distance includes a hill of about a mile in length ; or rather two hills, for I get an uphill of this length both going and returning. But even this disadvantage does not alter the fact that an outing to this spot is a real refresher when I have had a spell of intensive gardening or indoor work and feel the need of a break.

I had put my cycle in the shade of the wall by the little bridge, so that I could start right away at the run just above the bridge itself. Here the stream strikes a wall and turns at a right-angle under the arch. Under the wall it has scooped out a deepish pit which is always a likely spot for a good trout. There is a trick in getting the fish that lie under this wall. The best way is to cast at the wall itself and let the fly hit it and drop naturally into the water. Plenty of real flies do this, particularly on a windy day, and the trout have them in a flash. But to-day there is only one small fish that takes any notice of my fly, so I move up a few yards to the

corner pool. This pool, though it has the appearance of being just right, has never produced more than an occasional fish; but to-day I am in luck. Standing by the ash-stump at the foot of the pool, the main stream flows straight towards my feet until it comes to within about a yard of the bank, when it turns at a sharp right-angle to the left. It is this deepish run close under my feet that must receive first attention, as a fish taken higher up would certainly put down any that happened to be stationed close under the bank. I know there is a good fish occupying this stretch, but it is tricky work fishing so close in, and I am not very hopeful as I make the attempt. But everything goes beautifully, the fish comes up, a quick strike, and it is struggling violently to get under the roots of the ash. I have to hold it on a tight line and let the rod do the playing. One can usually do this quite safely with a very light rod, as the give of the rod prevents any sudden strain being put on the cast; it is very much a question of touch, not holding the rod so rigidly that only the top does the playing, but giving sufficiently to keep a steady strain when the fish makes a particularly vigorous dash, following its movements forward and back, and to right and left, and recovering the upright position of the rod as the strain slackens off.

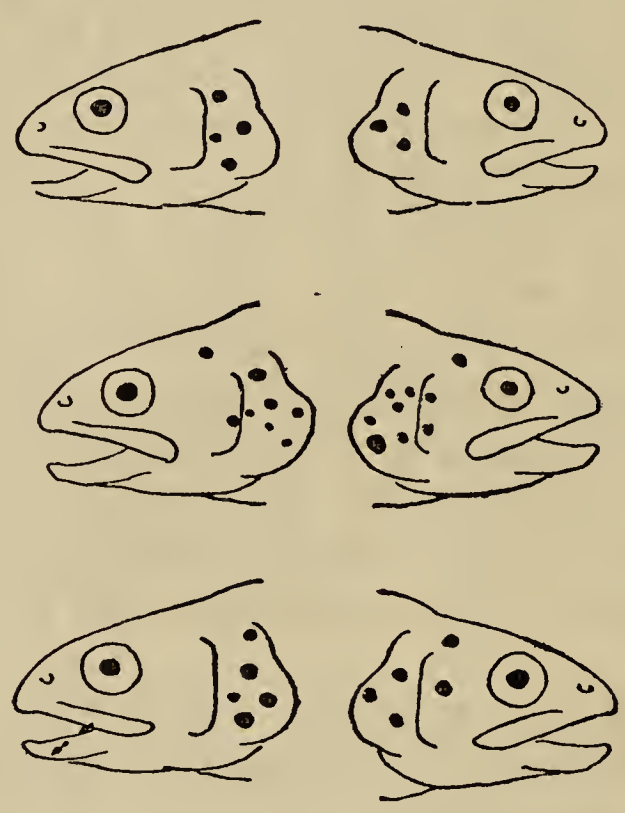
When I have wrapped this fish in a couple of dock leaves I put the fly over the centre and towards the edges of the pool. At the further side of the pool and close to the edge of the run of water through the centre I hook another fish. I bring this one downstream and fight it in the same water as the first. This trout shortly joins the other between the dock leaves.

I must now let out another foot or two of line and fish the run-in itself. You will observe that I refer to a foot and not a yard of line. This pool, though reasonably large for the size of the stream, is easily reached from one spot with only eight feet of line beyond the rod-top. This means that the farthest part of the pool is not more than twenty feet away from the spot on which I stand. As the water is perfectly clear and not more than three feet deep, it is obvious that considerable care must be exercised in fishing the pool in

such a manner that any fish caught will not disturb any of the others. In casting up into the run-in I see a large fish move off the bottom and turn at the fly. Fortunately he does not touch it ; possibly the pull of the water on the cast made it travel slightly faster than a natural insect would have done and the trout misjduged the speed. It will not do to put the fly over the fish again the very next second. A natural pause must be given so that its suspicions will not be aroused. I occupy the time by carefully drying the fly and giving it another dressing of dope ; then I put it over carefully so that it pitches on the water slightly ahead of the fish and a little to one side. This is a carefully thought-out cast, and not merely a chance throw somewhere in the direction of the fish ; I intend that the fly shall come to the fish in a certain manner and that the fish will take it in a certain manner. The result is most satisfactory. The trout turns to take the fly and then turns away again with the hook in its mouth ; it had to turn away again because no fish can lie across a rapid current. This is exactly as I had anticipated and I jerk the hook home into the angle of the jaw, which is the safest holding place in a trout's mouth. The commotion this fish puts up will certainly frighten any others that may be in the pool into hiding beneath the roots and stones ; but I have already beaten all previous records by taking three fish from this little corner and can hardly expect that there can be any more worth-while fish in the place.

I get three more fish in the meadow further up and a couple of small ones, which I carefully return. This is all that I require at the moment, and I object to slaughtering fish simply in order to make a big bag ; I would much prefer to spread the pleasure over several days in the future. I sit down under the shade of a tree, light a pipe and turn out the trout on the grass. I take a great interest in noting the variations in the markings of trout. No two are exactly alike in this respect. On this occasion I concentrate on the markings on the head and compare one side with the other. In only one of the six fish are the markings exactly the same on both sides of the head. This fish has one solitary spot placed rather high up on the gill covers. In one other case the number of spots

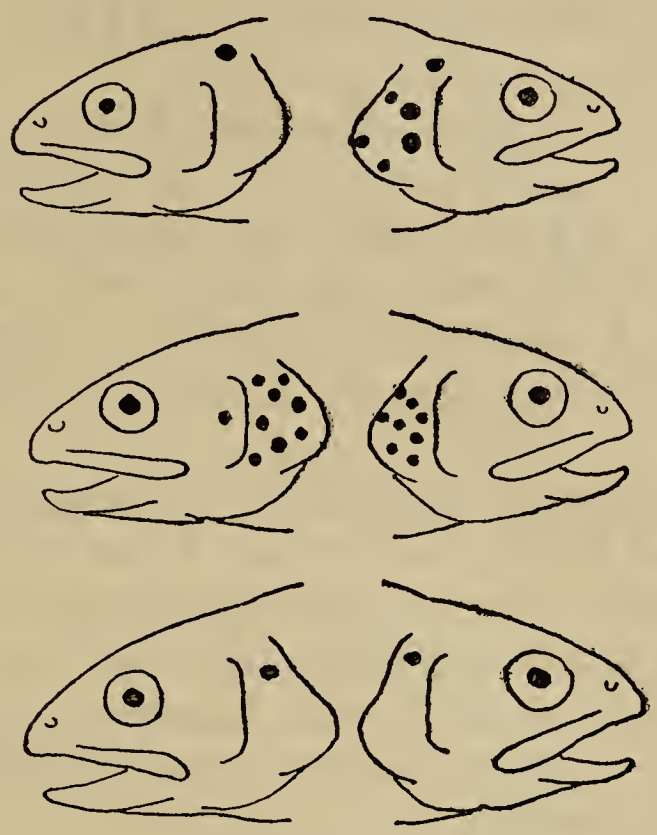
is the same—five on each side; but whereas on the left side all five spots are on the gill cover, on the right side one is on the cheek and another rather high up on the head. In several cases three spots occur in a perfectly straight line; I have noticed this peculiarity a good many times in trout from this small stream. I find that this examination of the fish adds considerably to the interest of the outing.



IN ONE CASE THE NUMBER OF SPOTS IS THE SAME—FIVE ON EACH SIDE

I had brought the small billhook along with me, and as I go back along the stream I trim out one or two spots for a future visit. I do not cut everything right back, but merely hack off the most conspicuous brambles and any low-hanging branches that make it impossible to get at the water at that particular spot. I like to see a certain amount of cover, and I like a few obstacles to make the fishing more interesting. In some cases I merely cut back the tips of a few branches so as to leave an opening about a yard wide. In such a place

I know I shall only be able to fish when there is no wind. I could cut the alders right back and so have an opening fishable whatever the state of the weather; but it is more interesting to have one's fishing so managed that one can



ONLY ONE OF THE FISH HAD MARKINGS EXACTLY THE SAME ON BOTH SIDES OF THE HEAD

only fish certain places under certain conditions. Now, on a still day I shall be able to say, "I'll try the corner pool above the flag-bed. I ought to be able to get a fly on to it to-day—I haven't fished it now for nearly a month."

CHAPTER II

MOORLAND WATERS

1. *Early Moorland Trout*

I DON'T know if I am odd in my preferences with regard to trouting in the early part of the season, but, given the choice, I prefer to fish small moorland streams rather than the larger and perhaps deeper waters bordered by fields and meadows.

If I am to go trouting in March (and there have been times when it has been then or not at all), I like to be amongst the heather and rocks. The surroundings may be rather bleak and the wind is almost certain to be a trial, never being twice in the same direction and often keeping the cast billowing above the water, giving one an utterly helpless feeling for perhaps minutes on end.

The stream will certainly be full, but the water will not have that chilly and somewhat sinister appearance that it has at this time of the year in the lower reaches. There is always something joyous about the water of a moorland stream in the early part of the year.

And what of the trout ?

Some, no doubt, will be dark and lank. You may have to return one or two because of their want of condition. These fish will almost certainly be taken in fairly slack water and will not have suffered much by struggling against the stream ; you need, therefore, have no fear about their recovery if yon have been careful not to handle them too roughly. The majority, however, will show an amazing strength for their size and the time of the year, giving little indication that they have just passed through the lean winter months. Four to the pound will be a very good average and, though they look small I, at any rate, can make a thoroughly satisfactory

breakfast from one of them with several slices of brown buttered toast. Very satisfying are these little fish, and of so dainty a flavour that one loses the taste if one does not eat slowly and a little at a time.

One can go light on these moorland outings, particularly in the earlier months of the year. Nevertheless, I *always* take a net. My friends sometimes say, " Why clutter yourself with that thing ? " I know I may not have to use it once in half a dozen trips, but there comes a day when one hooks an altogether out-size trout in a pool overhung with low sallows or cut alders. To lift it with the rod would probably result in a broken top, and to take the cast in the hand and try to lift it out in that manner will certainly mean a lost fly and a lost fish. Even those very friends have sometimes blessed my persistence in thus burdening myself, and it always gives me great satisfaction to turn their scoffings into grateful thanks.

I believe also in having a deep pocket to the net. Some say, " Oh ! You only need a scoop for these little fish." I have seen good fish jump out of such a " scoop." I have never had one jump out of my net, and I don't think that one ever will. My net is eighteen inches deep and will take a seven-pound fish ; not very readily, it must be admitted, but it can be done. I have not yet taken a seven-pound moorland trout, nor do I expect to do so, but I have had some pretty hefty sea-trout whilst trout-fishing later in the season and have found my deep net a great blessing.

There are still a good many people who fish for these moorland trout with a long cast and flies strung down its length like washing on a clothes-line. Many of them are " natives." These methods have been employed by their ancestors from time immemorial, and " what they don't know about catching trout isn't worth knowing." This is very near the truth ; many of these local anglers are astonishingly clever at the game, but they differ somewhat from the sportsman angler in their point of view. The pleasure that they get from an outing is measured almost solely by the contents of the basket when they return. The sportsman angler can count a day well spent that produces only one fish caught under memorable

conditions. I never dispute with one of these local worthies, nor do I waste time by attempting to argue with them on any line of sporting ethics. I put on my most half-baked expression and let them tell me the whole story of how to catch trout. Often I pick up quite a nice lot of useful information. Sometimes I change my fly on their advice, and sometimes I move off to some specially recommended stretch that I might not have reached in my slow progress up the stream had I not met with them and been assured that it was much to be preferred to the stretch immediately in front of me. But I will not descend to this water-raking business. I adopt a compromise. I prefer to use one fly only; but I find that by using two I can combine the delight of casting one fly with deliberate intent at a selected fish and at the same time be in a position to put into practice a little trick I have often found pays extremely well. By having my dropper at least one yard from the point fly I find that I can fish the latter dry to a fish rising in the slack where the long heather overhangs from the opposite bank; I can use both wet when I come to a stickle where a dry fly would be out of place; and I can "dibble" the dropper when I come to the sort of place where this particular method is often most successful. This "dibbling" is a trick to be employed when one comes to one of those small, quiet spots beside a big rock. Often such a spot is not more than a foot across. Where the place is very small I select an angle that will give me its greatest measurement to fish over. I shall require as much room as possible, as it is the dropper that is to do the trick by this method, the tail fly acting only as a brake. It follows, therefore, that one must have at least something more than one yard of water in which to work the dropper. For preference, I shall fish across. I do this for two reasons: first, because I can hook a fish much better when fishing across a stream, and, second, because this seems to be the most natural direction for the fly to travel in the method I propose to adopt. But it is not of essential importance in what direction the fly travels. Having selected the angle, I cast so that, if all goes well, my dropper will dibble along on the surface across the still stretch. The idea is to imitate a fly that has bumped

into, or fallen from, a rock and is scuttering along the surface in the hope of being able to rise again or of reaching some stick or stone on which it can find refuge. The dragging tail fly helps one to do this and, if the trout which we hope is lurking close to the rock behaves as it should under these circumstances, we shall have hooked it on the dropper before the dragging tail-fly comes into its range of vision and warns it that there is dirty work afoot.

You will see that, with my two flies, I have at my command three distinct styles of fishing suitable for any type of water to be found on a moorland stream. The man with the string of flies may get a few more fish than I do, but he won't get half the fun out of catching them unless, of course, he is one of those whose only measure of satisfaction is in the weight and numbers of his catch.

I always use hackle flies. Not that I have any particular prejudice against winged flies. My preference for hackle flies arises from the fact that I make my own, and they are so much easier to make than the winged styles; and, anyway, a winged fly becomes a hackle fly after it has been dragged through a dozen stickles and caught two or three trout. So why bother to give it wings? Strange, also, the more it gets knocked about, the better the fish seem to like it.

With regard to the sort of flies to use. If I don't know the local favourites, I always start with a dark rusty Blue Upright as a tail fly and a fairly light red-hackled fly as dropper. These two are not so much varieties as types. In the rather full, slightly tinted water they will resemble pretty closely quite a number of varieties, and it is unlikely that the trout will require a closer imitation. If I find that these two do not receive the attention they should, and a passing native informs me that such-and-such a fly is the only variety they will take at that particular time, I change the tail fly for the nearest I have to the fly he suggests.

Sometimes I change the flies round if I find that the dropper seems the most attractive. It is the tail fly that does most of the work, and it is therefore necessary that this should be the variety that the fish happen to prefer at the time. Not only is the tail fly doing its share as a wet fly, but it has

to do practically all the dry-fly work, as it is with this fly that one casts deliberately at a fish. It is only in the "dibbling" operation that the dropper usually does all the work. But I don't worry myself unduly about changing; I fish for pleasure, and tying on flies at my time of life and with my eyesight is not a completely pleasurable occupation. I once met a man who said that he had tried thirty-two varieties of flies in a day. That sort of thing may be all right on the Test, but I think it a waste of time on moorland waters. This poor fellow had one trout to show for his trouble. I had used the same two flies all day and had eleven fish. It wasn't because I was the better fisherman. The chief reason was, I think, that I had spent quite twice as long fishing that day as he had. Even at that time I think it would have taken me over three hours to remove, replace in box, select and tie on thirty-two flies. I don't suppose either of us was on the water more than six hours; therefore, assuming that he could tie on his flies no quicker than I, he must have employed half his day in that fiddling occupation.

And what joy at midday to lean one's rod against a granite boulder, sit down and get one's back against the stone, eat a couple of sandwiches and light a pipe. Maybe there are only three fish in the bag. What does it matter? It has been a morning of real rest and refreshment and there are still several hours in front of us if that big cloud keeps on the further side of the hill. We may actually finish up with half a dozen trout, and that is a good bag in these days.

2. *On Moorland Waters*

It is admitted by every fly-fisher that dry-fly fishing is the highest form of the art and, I think quite justly, the dry-fly man is usually looked upon as a more artistic angler than any other; but it is well known that the dryfly has its limitations, and, under certain conditions and at certain times, the method is almost useless if one wishes to capture more than a very occasional trout. I had this brought before me very forcibly during the Easter week-end.

I had a friend staying with me who is a very much more skilful handler of his rod than I am. He is a dry-fly man almost exclusively, and the way in which he places his fly fills me with envy. My experience of the dry fly proper has been confined almost exclusively to an occasional outing on the Upper Thames and the Dorsetshire Allen. On both these

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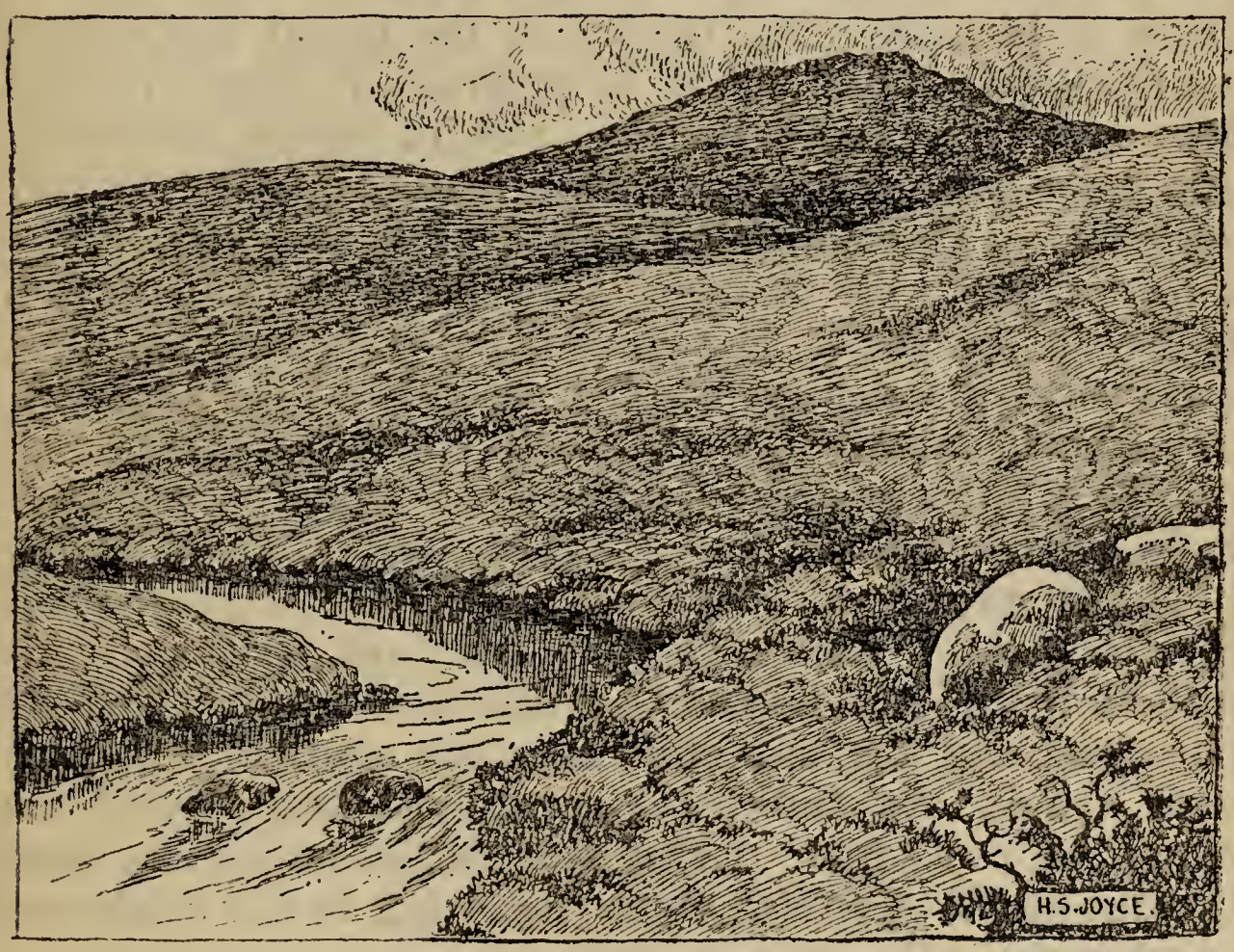


THE CHERRY BROOK, DARTMOOR

waters I have done satisfactorily; but the test has not been of sufficient duration to enable me to decide how much of the result has been due to good luck and how much to good management. For the rest, I use the dry fly at "dead low" periods in summer on the West Country rivers that I have fished for years, and off and on throughout the season as occasion or situation suggests.

This Easter was my friend's first visit to the South Dartmoor rivers, and I was particularly anxious that he should be

satisfied. What we learnt between us may be of interest and value to others who may decide on a temporary change from the clear, weedy glides of their favourite chalk-stream to the swift runs and rocky pools of some moorland, or semi-moorland, river.

Of course, I did not start by telling my friend what to do—I should have preferred to have asked his advice—but I gave him the guest's privilege of going first and was content to follow in his wake. My catch over the period was exactly ten times that of his, and, as he remarked, it seemed to have been made in defiance of every rule of correct fly-fishing. The water being fairly heavy made it useless to fish directly upstream. I therefore fished mostly across and down at half a right-angle to my position. Directly the fly had pitched, I drew in the slack. This caused the fly to sink and drag slightly under water. On seeing me do this, my friend remonstrated, remarking that I could hardly expect a trout to take a fly under those conditions. But that is just what I did expect. His fly floated without check, or sank as the turbulent waters overwhelmed it. He rose fish, but could not touch them, the reason being that, not being in touch with his fly as I was, he could not tighten with sufficient speed to connect with the very rapid risers one meets with in these swift waters. He studied the natural flies and selected the nearest he could find; I rang the changes on a rusty Blue Upright and a light Half Stone, according to the brightness or otherwise of the day or water.

A summary of the results of our subsequent discussion would be as follows, bearing in mind that the water was full and slightly coloured:

Fish always as much across as possible.

Connect up with your fly directly it pitches and see that you are in direct touch with it at all times, so that, even should you not see a rise, you may feel at once the slightest touch.

Keep the fly just beneath the surface and work it slightly to convey the impression of life.

Rely on a type rather than a definite variety of fly and do not waste time continually changing.

Though fish may be seen to rise in the still sides of the pools and suchlike places, the best fish are usually in the stream and feeding under water; therefore fish the stream for preference.

If a breeze springs up, go straight to the nearest moderately shallow flat and cast where the gusts ruffle the surface, but leave the flats directly the wind drops and they become calm.

These are the main points. They should ensure a fair measure of success to any moderately competent angler, and certainly should prove more profitable than the more stylish-looking dry-fly methods.

Had the river been at summer level, I think it more than likely that the results would have been reversed; but I had a very decided advantage over my friend here, because long acquaintance with the river and its changes had convinced me that it is no use sticking to rule-of-thumb methods under all conditions. Observation has proved to me that when the river is full very few flies float on the surface; those which alight on the water are sucked under by some swirl or eddy within a very few seconds, and it is on these drowning, or drowned, creatures that the trout are accustomed at such times to feed.

CHAPTER III

THE OLD AND THE NEW

1. *Going Back*

IT started with my latest book. I sent a copy to an old friend, and he, in acknowledging it and thanking me, wrote : " If ever you feel you'd like to run over some of your old fishing ground in these parts, we shall be delighted to put you up." I had had the idea in the back of my head for some years, but something always seemed to stand in the way ; first it was business, then the demands of the family holiday, then a home, garden and pets that could not well be left. But I had begun to feel that if ever I was to carry out my plans, I should have to act with determination and allow nothing to stand in my way. So I put the case to my wife, found that she was willing to carry on without my help for a week or ten days, and wrote to my friend to say that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to come, as he had suggested, and renew acquaintance with him and my old surroundings.

It may sound rather ridiculous to some, but a river is to me a sort of personality. And it has one advantage over a human personality in that it does not grow old, or at any rate does not appear to do so according to human standards. One can receive a very decided shock sometimes on renewing acquaintance with a human friend after the lapse of a good many years. You answer the door and a woman stands there. She greets you by name and you gape rather stupidly. " Don't you remember me ? " she says, and gives her name. You stammer in confusion : " Oh, yes ! Of course, of course ! How stupid of me ! I'm so sorry—not quite so quick in the uptake as I used to be—old age, you know. Come in, do." And all the time you are thinking, Can this rather faded

THE WALKHAM BY GRENOFEN

person really be the charming young thing you used to know? You forget the lines on your own face, the scanty and greying locks and the increasing stoop of the shoulders. Fortunately a man does not notice these changes in himself. A slowly-increasing stiffness in the joints and a gradually lessening ability to skip over hedges and ditches are the only things to warn him that he is no longer as young as he was. But a river remains the same over an immense length of time and perpetually renews its youth. Unless the hand of man has fallen upon it, a river will retain its charm throughout our lives and the lives of our children and our children's children. So I set off full of hope to see once again those laughing shallows, those thoughtful deeps, and those boisterous torrents; and I wondered if I should remember the pools and runs, the shady walks, the sunlit spaces and the fern-decked rocks.

I found that everything possible had been arranged so that I need waste no time in preparations for my visit to the stream. My fishing ticket would be delivered to me on the road and at the same time a neighbour would pick me up in her car and deposit me at a spot within easy reach of the water. A 'phone call next morning warned me that my ticket was on the way, so I picked up my rod and bag and walked up the lane to the appointed spot, where I whiled away the few minutes of waiting by chumming up with a friendly little Dartmoor pony. The man with the ticket presently arrived in his car and handed the ticket over to me, at the same time giving me some very useful information regarding the water available, certain changes having taken place during the period since I last fished in that district. Then the neighbour drove up in her car and I got in and was eventually deposited at a point where a short-half-mile walk downhill brought me to the old bridge and the river I had been so longing to see.

I felt a warm surge of pleasure run through me as I first caught sight of the beautiful pale amber water. I looked over the rails on the downstream side of the bridge to see if the trout still rested below the right-hand buttress; but I was not surprised at seeing nothing living in the water: the grey sky and chilly air would not induce any trout to rise

from the depths to wait there at the edge of the current for drifting flies. I looked upstream to a spot a yard or two out from the right bank, where a salmon often used to lie. It was one of those places which appear to afford no resting place, yet always attract a single fish. The stream, about three feet deep at the spot, flows steadily over a level floor and seems that it must sweep with an even pressure from surface to bottom throughout the stretch ; but a careful study of the gravel discloses that at that particular spot the stones are very much smaller than in any other part, indicating that just there, for some reason or other, the current does not actually sweep along the bed of the stream, but leaves a small area of almost still water in which a fish can lie and rest. There was no salmon lying in the old spot, but I could see that the place was still suitable as a lie, the fine gravel was still there and a waterlogged dead leaf slowly rolling along the bottom clearly proved that the sweep of the current over the bed of the stream was practically negligible.

I put up my rod on the bridge and started off downstream. It was delightful to find that I could remember accurately every run and corner, and that I seemed to know almost by instinct what I should find as I passed from pool to pool. It was like re-reading, after a lapse of a great many years, a book one has known and loved in one's youth, when, as one turns each page, one knows one is now approaching some particularly appealing passage or some peculiarly interesting incident. I believe I could have walked there in the dark and told you exactly what type of pool lay there in the blackness.

The fish were not moving, but that lessened my pleasure only very slightly ; my chief delight was with my memories. Here was a spot where on a soft, warm evening in May I caught half a dozen fine trout all within a space measuring scarcely a dozen feet in either direction. It was at the lip of a weir and the water flowed with an almost imperceptible movement. A gusty wind now ruffled the surface and I cast over it in the hopes that some fish might still be there and ready to rise ; but all I saw was the quick splash of a little salmon smolt, and I knew that if they were on the move it

was unlikely that the trout would be feeding at all freely. Here, close under my feet, was the rock from beneath which a good sea-trout rose to take my fly one night in July and was eventually landed after a long and exciting struggle. I knew there would be no sea-trout there so early in the year, but it was pleasant to recall the incident. Two dippers bobbed and ducked on the stones at the lip of the pool. There always used to be a pair of dippers at this spot, and I wondered if these birds were descendants of the pair I used to see there.

At the head of the pool was a nice streamy stretch which often proved a profitable place in which to fish. I covered every yard of it carefully, but brought no trout to the surface. I was slightly annoyed at losing a fly in the branches of an oak behind me. I ought not to have been caught out in this manner. I must have lost at least a dozen flies in the branches of that oak in my early days, and I ought to have remembered to keep the point of my rod low and to one side when making the back cast.

I was now making my way upstream above the bridge, and presently met a schoolboy angler and stopped to speak to him. Finding him a friendly and sensible little chap, I took him back to the spot where I had lost my fly and held him up so that he could reach up with his rod and try to catch the point of the hook in the top ring; I have recovered many a fly in this manner. In the present case it so happened that, just when my arms were beginning to give out with the weight of the boy, the twig broke off and the fly fell to the ground with it.

At the corner pool above the viaduct I rose a really lovely fish. I held him for a couple of seconds, then he shook his head and the hook came away. This pool also held a pleasant memory. I was working my way upstream one summer afternoon and met the village schoolmaster working downstream. The water was full and peat-stained, and I was using a coachman. The schoolmaster, an experienced fisherman, expressed surprise at anyone using a coachman during the daytime, but I have often done so with success when the water is high and coloured—conditions similar to night to the fish beneath the surface. The schoolmaster told me that he

had risen and missed a very good fish in a certain spot in this corner pool, and he described its exact position to me. When I reached the place I fished carefully over the spot he had described and at once rose and hooked a sea-trout of about a pound and a half, which I netted after an extremely anxious battle.

Farther upstream I came to a stretch overhung by high alders which held memories of an absurd adventure. Coming to the stream one evening years ago I met a friend who told me that he was doing well with a Half Stone. I had no specimen of this fly in my box, so he kindly gave me one. There was a gusty wind blowing at the time, which, in this rather steep-sided valley, often blew straight upwards. Coming to this tree-lined stretch, my fly was caught in one of these sudden upward gusts and became firmly attached to the highest bough of one of the alders. I could not afford to lose my one-and-only Half Stone, so I at once started to climb the tree after it. I had detached it from the bough and was just about to descend when I suddenly discovered myself under water. The tree had given way at the base, but I had been so engrossed in the recovery of my fly that I had failed to notice that I was falling. My emergence was so rapid that my pipe was still alight when I climbed ashore, but I was soaked to the skin and there was nothing for it but to make my way to the nearest cottage and try to get a change of clothes. I walked up to "Magpie" and was there provided with what I required, but the garments I changed into were for a man half my size. The top of the trousers and bottom of the waistcoat left about three inches of shirt exposed, the sleeves of the coat scarcely reached half-way below my elbows, and the legs of the trousers left a wide space between their hem and the tops of my boots. When I reached the station platform to catch the train back to Plymouth, my friend, who was also returning by the same train, was immediately doubled up with mirth at the sight of my astonishing appearance. I returned the borrowed garments when I came out to fish the following Saturday afternoon, and then fished my way down to Double Waters, where I again fell in. Fortunately, on this occasion I had my own bundle of dried clothing into

which I could change, so that Fate had done the best it could to combine my clumsiness with my convenience.

Then came the long, deep pool in which the current set away sharply under the far bank. It was in this pool that I caught my first really (relatively) large trout, a beauty of nearly three-quarters of a pound. It is a difficult pool to fish as the nature of the bank prevents one from getting an effective back cast with a long line, but I went over it carefully in the hopes that it would produce a worthy descendant of my trout of happy memories. The pool might have been completely devoid of fish for all the response I got to my efforts.

At the top of this pool is a strip of very deceptive boggy ground. It is a very narrow strip—two quick steps and one is again on a sound footing. But the safest way is along the rocks at the edge of the water. The rocky path is slightly longer and more difficult to traverse, so, without much thought, I took the quicker and easier way across the bog. Of course I went in over the top of one boot. I was vexed about this. I had recognized the place directly I came to it and remembered its treachery, but I had failed to act upon the experience of former years and had a wet foot as the result.

Then came the place where I caught the pound fish: the first pound trout of my life. I took right on at the heels of the schoolmaster, when he had moved on not fifty yards ahead. It was a sheer fluke, but a very exciting one. The trout took my fly within a foot of the bank, and must have been lying right under the schoolmaster's feet when he was fishing the run farther out. This incident taught me to fish all the water close in before trying the perhaps more inviting water farther out.

It did not seem to matter that I was catching nothing worth keeping, nor scarcely seeing a worth-while fish; I was enjoying every minute of the day. Memories, memories, memories came flooding in upon me almost every step forward that I took. I came to the long pool below Bedford Bridge (which we used to call Magpie Bridge), where a high and steep mound behind the narrow path makes it necessary to keep the fly well up in making the back cast. I remembered an evening

there with the friend who was now my host. He netted the fish as I hooked and played them to the bank. I do not remember exactly how many we caught that summer evening, but it was six or eight, and all good fish of round about six ounces in weight each. I fished this pool carefully, but caught nothing. Next day I came there again and caught a nice little trout of eight and a half inches on the way down, and another about half an inch smaller almost within a yard of the same spot on my return journey about six hours later.

At the stickle below the Bridge Pool I noticed the first real change. When I had last fished there some of the curious lumps of red sandstone stood in the river itself, and between them was a small but useful pocket from which I have taken many good fish, including one of a pound. Now I found many of the great sandstone blocks almost on the shore and amongst them an alder some fifteen or twenty feet high. The tree had grown there during my absence. These great lumps of sandstone have always been rather a mystery to me. They seem to be quite different from any rocks to be found in the immediate neighbourhood, and I should rather like to find someone who would explain how they came to be in this spot. Some of these stones are separated from the bank and are piled up in an irregular fashion close to the edge of the water ; but there is a shallow cliff of the same composition which indicates that lumps have been broken from the main cliff by human or other agency.

There remained now only the Bridge Pool itself. There used to be three good spots in this pool : on the far side, right at the tail and just at the upper end of the rather tall sallows fringing the stickle on the far bank ; towards the tail and opposite a sallow bush growing alone from the opposite bank about a third of the way up the pool ; and sometimes right under the arch of the bridge itself. I tried all these places most carefully, but without result. A day or two later I tried there again and moved a good fish in each of these three places ; but there was a very stiff breeze blowing at the time and, though this helped me by ruffling the surface of the water, it also hindered me by producing such a belly in my

line that my strike must have reached the hook long after the fish had discovered the deception and discarded the fly.

It had now begun to rain, and I had a mile and a half to go to get home. I packed up reluctantly, but happily. It was an extraordinary frame of mind to be in. I had been so happy renewing memories of my lovely friend and revelling on her smiles that I was reluctant to tear myself away from her company; but I was full of gladness to find her still so charming, still so sprightly and youthful, still so full of freshness and beauty. I shed my own age for a time in her bright company and became once again a young man full of vigour and keenness.

I spent a week beside that stream and in that week I saw her again in most of her moods. I saw her a light and sparkling amber colour, I saw her a rich deep porter brown, and I saw her so crystal clear that I could see every fin of a lovely sea-trout that lay on the grey-green rocks ten feet down in one of the deepest pools.

I want to visit all my old haunts once again before I get too old to walk and fish. I may meet with some disappointments, but if the majority have so well retained their power to attract me as has this, the first of my old loves to be revisited, I shall have very few regrets and shall at last lay aside my rods with a feeling of great gratitude for the pleasures they have brought me in the friendly rivers to which they have been the means of introduction.

2. *New Ground*

To fish the same water throughout a season, or series of seasons, is a very comfortable sort of pleasure. To know every step of the way, the peculiarities of each pool or corner, the special manner in which each place should be fished in order to get the best results from it, the most comfortable way of approaching each spot so as to avoid the many pitfalls for the feet, and the bramble thickets which will cause trouble with one's clothes and net, or branches that will endanger one's tackle or rod-top: all these things add greatly to the

comfort and contentment of a few hours by the water. To return to old haunts after, perhaps, years of absence is also a pleasure, but of a somewhat different type. In this case you cannot say that you know exactly what you will meet with round each corner. You may remember well enough the appearance of the place as it used to be, the way in which it used to be fished, and perhaps the exact positions in which the fish could be found, but you cannot tell what has happened since last you came that way. There have been floods and gales. In some places rocks may have shifted, banks may have been swept away, pools silted up, tree-stumps lodged at corners and new pits scooped out beneath them, old trees and roots, that once afforded shelter for many a good fish, swept away and trees that gave shelter on the bank, or caused obstruction to casting, may have been cut down. In fishing a stream that you have fished regularly for several seasons you are dealing with a friend who is so familiar that you pick up the conversation almost where you left off the last time you were together; with your old friend, who you have not seen for a good many years, you have to proceed more cautiously; there will be changes in his outlook, you may be sure, and there will be circumstances that will render you liable to "put your foot in it" by an incautious approach just as easily as you may, in real fact, find your foot well and truly bogged in a spot you once knew as firm ground. But when you go to an entirely new stream you scarcely know what to expect. A friend may have told you that it is just the place to suit you. He may have given you a description of the water and its surroundings and told you the most likely spots. He may have warned you of difficulties and dangers and given you the fullest details of all that you are likely to require information about. But, however well-primed you may be beforehand, the outing will always be an adventure. Your old haunts and your regular haunts may have adventures in store for you, but your visits to them are not in themselves adventures in the same sense as is a visit to an entirely new place. If you have been given particulars of the place beforehand you will expect certain things to be or to happen, but it is notorious that it is only rarely that two

people see the same things in exactly the same way, and you may be pretty sure that you will not find the place exactly as you thought it was going to be from your friend's description.

I have just had a day on an entirely new stream. I had had the place described to me as being very much the same type of water as that which I now regularly fish, and I had been told further that the part which lay below the bridge was better than that upstream, so I had made up my mind to use the same outfit as I have been using twice a week throughout the season, and that I would start from the bridge and fish downstream. The boundary downstream, I had been told, was a wood, and upstream one could not go beyond a mill.

I had been toying with the idea of a visit to this water for such a long time without anything coming of it that I realized that I should have to make up my mind to go on a certain day and then go, no matter how unfavourable the conditions might seem. As it happened, the day I fixed on started cold, cloudy and looking decidedly as if it would get worse as it got older. Elizabeth decided to come with me, though she thought it likely that she would return earlier than I should on account of the weather. We packed up sandwiches and took rainproofs.

As we came down the hill to the bridge the clouds began to break apart, leaving large patches of clear blue. The sun came out and there seemed every prospect that the day would get warmer and finer. A little distance below the bridge was a large round pool, in the centre of which a good trout was rising. My hopes ran high ; I felt sure that I had been lucky in my choice of day and that the adventure was to be a delightful one. I put up my rod and started casting for the trout in the middle of the big round pool. I think I might have caught this fish if I had been prepared to risk the loss of my cast by taking it from a rather difficult angle, but I felt that this would not be justified, or, at any rate, not justified right at the start. So I left that pool and started working downstream. I had two nice fish by the time I had reached the end of the first meadow, but I realized that the water was too clear for making successful approaches upon unknown

spots from an upstream direction, and I was not really sorry when I noticed a wood, or, at any rate, a long thicket of trees, at this point. If this should indeed be the wood which formed the downstream boundary, this very short stretch of water must be wonderfully productive if it could be described as better than two miles of water upstream; it was either this, or that the water above the bridge must be almost worthless. At any rate, it did not seem advisable to go farther in that direction, as I had no wish to get into hot water by fishing outside my rights. We turned about and went back to the bridge.

Both banks of the stream were available to ticket-holders. My choice, from an angler's point of view, would have been the right bank, as I should then have been facing the sun, or at any rate the sun would never have been directly behind me. But the left bank seemed to suggest more comfortable travelling, and the appearance of the stream suggested that its course would be so irregular that I should have a good many opportunities of getting over the difficulty of having the sun behind me.

I started fishing in a little broken run just above the bridge. There was a larger and very much more attractive run just below which fed straight under the bridge, but this was unfishable from the bank I was on and I did not feel inclined to waste time going round to the other bank. I did badly at this little spot. I lost my fly in a fish within a few seconds of starting. Probably the fly ought to have been retied to the cast, but I had started right off in my usual rather careless way by taking out a cast already fitted with its fly, and no doubt this fly had already done good service and its attaching knot had become worn; so I expect it served me right. But I was rather vexed about this, as the fly I had been using was a very well-shaped specimen. I had several others of the same dressing, but no more of the same good proportions. I put on the best fly of the same kind that I could find and fished the remainder of the spot. I missed three more good fish in that little run, and one of them was a really fine one for this type of water.

Now came some rather difficult country, with brambly

banks, overhanging bushes and steep places, down which I had to scramble in order to reach the water. I did not do much along this stretch, and what few fish I did get were mostly small and had to be returned. There were some very deep pools which probably held trout, but, as no fish were rising, any that were in these places must have been well down in the depths or lying under the roots by the banks.

Continuing my way upstream, I presently came to a more open part. There were a few scattered thorn and hazel trees back from the banks and the ground was thick with the curled fronds of young bracken. Later on this place will be waist-high jungle and getting through it to fish will be a perspiring struggle; but in its present open state the going is easy, though the much exposed water is difficult to approach without being seen. Walking carefully along and taking advantage of every bit of cover to examine each pool before I cast over it, I soon managed to add another fish or two to my catch. I was very pleased over one of these. I peeped through the leaves of a low alder and saw two or three nice trout cruising slowly around in some still water over a sandy bottom. They were too far out for dapping, and I much doubted if I could cast over them with an overhand cast without alarming them with the flash of the rod. I waited and watched their movements. Presently they shifted farther out into the stream. I felt that now, if I could keep the rod low and avoid getting tangled up in the back-cast, I might get the fly over them without raising their suspicions. With great care I started getting the line out and presently put the fly down well within the area they were now patrolling. The largest fish in the bunch got there first and the others scattered when they saw the plight he was in. I was not entirely successful, however, in some parts of this open stretch and blundered on to several good trout before I had spotted them.

The scenery now changed again. Large trees grew in glades beside the stream and furnished the most delightful views. This stretch was so lovely that the sight of it alone would have made the outing well worth while. The little stream twisted and turned in every direction, with lovely little pools, rippling gravelly shallows and sandy bays and beaches. Here

was the place to have lunch. There was a perfect seat in a hollow on the rough bank, and in this I put my coat and sat back to rest and eat. Slender dragon flies hovered and fluttered about the sides of the stream, a curlew trilled its bubbling note overhead, willow warblers sang in the branches of the oaks, and a green woodpecker could be heard laughing somewhere farther up the valley. I wished I had my paints and sketching board; it seemed wrong to have to leave this lovely scenery without making some pictorial record of it. But my purpose had been to learn as much of the stream as possible and I would leave sketching to some future visit—for I had already resolved to come again before too long an interval had elapsed.

I took up my rod again and proceeded upstream. In a pool beneath a high and steep bank I saw a fine fish rise slowly from the depths and sink again out of sight. Creeping carefully forward, I cast again and again over the spot before I could get any response, and, when the fish did at last rise to my fly I missed it. I rarely fish again immediately for a fish I have missed. I find it pays to let it rest for a couple of minutes. I occupied the time of waiting by fishing water a few feet on either side of the place. In these small streams fish rising in fairly swift water, as this was, rarely occupy a space more than a foot in diameter. I rose a fish a couple of feet farther out and upstream, and missed this fish also: I believe this was a different fish. A couple of feet nearer in I caught a trout, which was certainly not the same fish, as it was quite two inches smaller. Whilst playing this fish I noticed another trout out of the corner of my eye. This fish was moving quietly round in some still water below me. I kept the fish I had hooked well upstream and beached it on some gravel at the head of the pool. Then I turned my attention to the fish below. Very soon I saw it come round again. Delicate work was needed here, as I was fully exposed; but I knew that the fish would not see me against the high bank, provided I made no sudden movement and did not allow either my person or my rod to appear above the sky-line. I caught that fish also and, whilst playing it, saw yet another rise beneath some roots under the opposite bank.

I scarcely hoped to get three fish from such a small pool, but I was certainly going to try. In these small places, where the whole extent of fishable water can be covered from one spot with about eight feet of line beyond the rod-top, it is essential to play each fish within as small an area as possible so as to prevent disturbance of others. This fish had been in no way disturbed by the hooking and playing of the second trout, and rose again whilst I was unhooking its pool-mate. I rose and missed the fish under the roots and bungled the next cast so badly that I put it down.

The twists and turns between lovely glades of large trees continued for some distance and I had a dozen nice trout in my bag before I had come within sight of the mill I had been told about. I had as many fish as I needed and sat down again to rest and admire my surroundings before turning back. As I smoked my pipe and looked at the stream I saw a mayfly appear on the surface of the water. It suddenly appeared sitting on the water in a shallow and still part of a pool. I cannot say that I saw it come to the surface, but I do not think it came there from the air, as I was looking straight at the pool and did not see it alight. I had always been under the impression that the larva climbed out of the water, rested on some grass-blade, and developed into the perfect insect from that position. This creature seemed to have popped straight out of the water, upon which it rested for a few minutes before it began a laboured flight, which eventually lifted it clear into the air.

I saw another mayfly a few minutes later, dancing up into the leaves of an oak tree, and yet a third sailing around on a little raft of bubbles in a corner of the pool. I did not expect to see the trout take any notice of these casual individuals. Where mayfly occur in these small streams, the trout rarely make any attempt to interfere with them until the hatch becomes fairly general. Sometimes a trout will be seen to come up and look at a single mayfly; it may even make a half-hearted attempt at taking it, but it rarely gets any further than that. I was evidently witnessing only the beginning of the hatch, as no more flies were seen and no trout took any notice of those which floated on the water.

The return journey was of course very much more rapid than the outward one, though we did not hurry ourselves. We had allowed ourselves a full hour, so as to be certain not to miss our train, but we found, when we reached the bridge, that we still had more than half an hour to wait. I thought I would occupy the time by trying that very inviting run just above the bridge.

I clambered down a wall on the opposite bank and cast out into the run. Almost at once I hooked the best fish of the day. This was a really strong trout and was a good example of what these small trout can do when it comes to a fight in swift water. I shouted to Elizabeth, who had remained on the bridge. She came scrambling through the hedge and down the wall, and took the net out of its sling across my back. The hedge against the river had been fortified with bundles of dead thorns and I feared for the safety of her stockings as she clambered over them. But the thorns only attacked the net and, after this had been freed, the fish was safely landed and handed up to me in its meshes. This fish was a beauty of nearly eleven inches and made a fitting climax to a most enjoyable day.

I stood on the bridge to pack up my rod, whilst my wife sat on the parapet and smoked a cigarette. She threw the stump into the stream when she had finished and at once a good trout rose and snapped at it. No doubt people often stop on the bridge and throw fragments of food into the water in the hopes of seeing a fish take them, and this trout probably thought the cigarette stump was a piece of bread; but sometimes trout in such situations seem to be devoid of a sense of taste: I have on one occasion fed them with broken aspirin tablets and on another with wax matches!

I made two presents of trout to friends on my way home and we both agreed that we could not have had a more satisfactory day in every way. The sport had been excellent, the weather delightful and the scenery perfect.

CHAPTER IV

TACTICS

1. *Staying Put*

THERE was a time when, to me, one of the joys of trout-fishing was to have almost unlimited miles of water before me and to go on and on, fishing the runs, pools and stickles until approaching darkness warned me that it was time to retrace my steps. As I started out with rod in hand, net across my back, and basket over my shoulder, I was filled with a sort of physical and mental hunger. It was not so much that I wanted to catch a great number of fish ; what I really wanted was to cram as much experience as I could into the few hours available. I wanted to see as much as possible of the country through which that particular river ran ; to revisit pools I had fished before, or to explore the possibilities of new ones ; and, by sampling widely, to endeavour to find out if and why the trout in that stream differed in their behaviour or locations from the trout of other streams, or other parts of that stream. Those were the days when a five-mile tramp homewards through rugged and difficult country, and often in the dark, was an experience to be welcomed, because in that way only can one really test the extent to which one has, perhaps subconsciously, observed the country through which one has travelled. It was my boast that I could retrace my track over a five-mile course on the darkest night without making one false step, though the outward journey might have been my first time over the ground, and this I have done not once only, but many times.

I was younger then, and though the strap of my basket often caused my shoulder to ache and the soles of my feet became hot and tender from beating against the rocks along

the path, the discomfort was rather a pleasure than a pain—proof that I had endured and conquered physical difficulties.

I enjoy my trout-fishing every bit as much as ever I did, but now I find that my attitude towards it has changed considerably. In those strenuous, energetic days I went a-fishing with much the same sort of mental attitude one adopts when one picks up a new and exciting book. One reads on and on, eagerly devouring the contents. Not a page or a paragraph is missed. The midnight hour has struck, but the thrill of the narrative holds and we read on into the night regardless of the loss of sleep. But now my fishing is more like the re-reading of a much-loved volume. Having already sampled the full beauty of its contents, I can now turn its pages and enjoy in detail that which I had previously enjoyed in the mass, finding fresh interest and beauty in paragraphs that had moved me only superficially at the first reading. So, when now I am fishing, I can be satisfied with a small stretch of water. A few pools and stickles will provide me with as much enjoyment as did many miles of water in my younger days; and in quietly fishing them, resting, and fishing them again, I find that I discover much that I should have missed had I passed on rapidly to the next stretch and the next. I think it must have been "Old Heath," the Dulverton fisherman, who taught me this, though I did not realize it at the time. He must have been over seventy when I knew him, and I often noticed that he would spend his whole day on about three hundred yards of water; yet he always seemed to catch as many fish and get quite as much pleasure out of the day as I did, though perhaps I had travelled many miles.

There is great consolation to be found in this for those who, perhaps because of age, cannot cover long distances. When one comes to think about it it seems obvious that there is certainly nothing lost by thoroughly exploring a limited extent of water at a time; probably much to be gained. In Association water, such as I have had to be content with for the greater part of my life, it is likely that the same stretch will be covered by several rods in the course of a day. You gain little by moving on, since it is probable that you are

just trailing another angler. In most cases trout in much-fished water are back at their stations within an hour of being disturbed, so why not return to them and leave those further on for another day ?

I find that this limiting of my area is giving me a fuller appreciation of places and circumstances encountered when fishing. There is much the same pleasure to be gained in memorizing every detail of the bottom of a pool, the varying movements of its currents, and the changes in the lighting as there is in obtaining an intimate and lasting memory of a beautiful passage in a book.

There was an afternoon spent on a wide stretch of fairly shallow water. The day was breezy and, because of the lack of current, fishing had to be confined to such times as a catspaw swept across the river and afforded concealment and a ruffling that rendered the gut inconspicuous. Wading quietly and slowly, I cast when the breeze disturbed the surface over a recent rise, or waited patiently during the still periods. Twice I came ashore to sit down, rest, and smoke a pipe. It was a very pleasant afternoon and the results were entirely satisfactory from every point of view. I was refreshed instead of fatigued, I had half a dozen nice fish in the bag, and I had learnt more about that particular stretch on that afternoon than in all the years I had visited it and fished it in the course of my progress up and down the stream.

There was another occasion when I spent the whole of an afternoon alternately resting upon a sloping, grassy bank and getting up to cast at a trout that I had seen rise in the close neighbourhood of a lump of white foam that slowly circled about an eddy in a wide pool. The water was deeply stained with peat, washed out of the bogs on the moor during a heavy storm on the previous day, and I suppose that the rise in the river had dislodged many insects from the banks, and these were presented to the trout as they escaped from the revolving lump of foam. I think it was six or seven trout that I took from that pool that afternoon.

Another morning I spent at a pool with my son, each taking turns with the rod after the other had caught a fish. I was then revisiting a stream I had fished when my son was a

baby in arms, and I found a great delight in introducing him to it. As we approached the spot I told him to look across the pool through an opening he would find in the bushes. "I think you will see a dozen or more trout in the fairly slack water on the far side," I told him. "Try to take the lowest outside one at first, so as not to disturb the others. You will have to cast almost directly at the fish because the stream quickly puts a drag on the fly; but see to it that the fly alights on your side of the fish, so that you attract it only and not another trout as well."

The trout were there as I had anticipated and my son followed my instructions carefully. I remembered the hole under the bushes towards the tail of the pool, by means of which one could reach a little beach of gravel, the only possible place where a fish could be netted, though quite out of sight of the angler. I crept through, instructed him when to let the struggling fish drop back with the current, and a moment later came back into the meadow with the trout in the net.

We had a grand time that morning changing places and netting each other's fish. I was reading again the pages of a book I had known and loved, and was proud and pleased that my knowledge could be used to give so much pleasure to my son.

Again, I was recovering from an operation and a visiting friend said to me, teasingly:

"Well, your fishing is over for the season."

"Not if I can get someone like you to take me to the river, help me into my waders, and put me into the water," I replied.

"You'd never stand up," he retorted.

"Yes, I will. The water will keep me up if you will put me in where it is between three and four feet deep. I'll probably drown if I fall over, but I'll risk that."

He took me down one evening and we both had a trout for breakfast next morning. Though I dared not move more than a couple of yards, it was splendid to be by the river again and to feel the kick of a fish.

And there are scores of similar instances I could recount.

You may be tired and overworked and feel that you cannot stand up to an afternoon's or an evening's fishing. Don't

try to cover long distances. Go quietly to the river and concentrate on one short stretch. Take it easy and rest at times, contemplating your surroundings and digesting your experiences. "Stay put"—you'll find it as profitable, as enjoyable, as instructive and certainly far less fatiguing than tramping perhaps several miles along the river.

2. *Advantageous Trifles*

Opportunities sometimes occur of taking advantage of some occasional incident connected with the surroundings of trout. At one of our Angling Association Meetings someone suggested that steps should be taken to stop bathing in the river; he reported, with indignation, that several times during the hot weather he had come to a certain pool and found there a dozen or more young fellows and girls disporting themselves in the water. He had no difficulty in finding a seconder to his proposal. Somewhat to the surprise of the other members, I at once asked to be allowed to speak on the matter before it was put to the meeting and proceeded to point out that the presence of bathers in this pool was an advantage to anglers. This pool was quite unfishable during a hot afternoon or evening; the bathers therefore would not by their presence hinder anglers from enjoying their sport. I had in fact benefited by their presence, for I had found that, immediately after they had finished, one could wade in at the shallow end of the pool and catch trout which had come out to take toll of the many small aquatic insects disturbed from the bottom. My statements so much impressed the chairman that he asked me to give some details of my actual experience. I gave him the details of an evening I had spent there only a few days before.

I had not intended fishing the pool, as I knew it would be quite useless in its then perfectly still state and with a cloudless sky above; my intention had been to go further upstream and fish a deep little run in the shade under overhanging bushes. But on coming to the pool I saw it was occupied by half a dozen young men; so I sat down on the bank and lit

a pipe. One of the bathers very politely came forward and said that he hoped he and his friends were not spoiling my evening's sport. I assured him that, far from that being the case, if they would presently finish their bathe and then allow the pool to remain quiet for ten minutes or so, it was quite probable that they would have materially assisted me. This interested him so much that he told his friends to hurry up and get their bathe over so that I might fish, as he wanted to see what would happen. I told them not to hurry, but when they had finished I should be glad if they would help me by not letting any others who might happen to come along enter the water until I had had my pleasure from it.

Almost as soon as the bathers had left the water I went down to the tail and started to wade up into the pool; I had noticed that the fish had been moving even before the last bather had come out. Fishing upstream with a nymph, I had soon caught two or three nice trout, probably half as many again as I should have taken if I had gone up to the shady run under the bushes.

I explained to the bathers that they had stirred up the bottom by walking about and so dislodged food for the trout, and that the trout had learnt to ignore them because they came there on most fine evenings and so had become accustomed features of the place.

The proposal to take steps to prohibit bathing was defeated.

Trout very soon get used to disturbances. Trout living in a pool right under a railway embankment took no notice of the passing of trains though the vibrations were sufficient to set up visible ripples on the surface of the water. Had a train passed only once a week instead of once every two hours, the fish would have gone down and stayed down for perhaps an hour afterwards.

One evening I was fishing with a friend in a meadow in which was a herd of cows. We had reached a part of the river where the water was rather deep and quite still. I said:

"We ought to be able to get a fish or two along this stretch."

"I don't see how you are going to get near the water without being seen," replied my friend; "and the place is as still as a pond."

"I don't think that is going to make much difference, provided one moves slowly," I replied. "There are cows in the field."

"Whatever have cows to do with it?"

"The fish are accustomed to seeing the cows moving along the bank, and, provided you move quietly and slowly, it is unlikely that they will take any more notice of you than they do of the cows. Of course, you mustn't walk bang up to the edge and start waving your rod about over the water; keep back at a reasonable distance and keep the rod low."

I demonstrated that there was some truth in my theory by catching a trout almost at once from perfectly still and clear water.

Near my home there was a shallow in which dwelt several trout which I found quite impossible to catch. They lay out on the gravel completely exposed, and it was quite useless trying to get anywhere near them with a rod. But I would not give up the attempt, and every year, when I came home for a few days' holiday, I went there once or twice and tried to break the unfortunate record, but without success. One day I came there and found the shallow full of cows. It seemed useless even to attempt fishing. I sat down and waited for the cows to finish their bathe.

Presently I saw a trout rise within a few yards of a cow. I was rather surprised. I continued to watch.

Soon another trout was seen to rise, and shortly after that a third. The fish seemed to be taking flies which the cows swiped off their backs with their swishing tails. I began to get very interested.

A little more watching and it began to dawn upon me that here was the very opportunity I had been waiting for for so long. I put on a black fly and started walking very quietly into the water and towards the cows. I had to keep a very sharp lookout to avoid disturbing an outlying trout which might dash upstream and scare others. I also had to avoid scaring the cows. The cows looked round at me, but seemed to think that I also had entered the water merely to enjoy its coolness, just as they were doing. Then I stood still and waited for a fish to rise some distance below the cattle, for I

knew that a plunging, kicking fish close to their heels would soon send them out of the river.

At last I found my chance. A trout rose not twenty feet in front of me and well below the cows. I hooked it and kept it from running too far upstream. The nearest cows took only a very mild interest as I played and netted this fish.

Again I waited, and again I was rewarded by seeing a fish rise within comfortable reach and not too close to the cattle. This fish also behaved as I had intended and went to join the other in my bag.

The next fish to rise was not more than about three yards from one of the cows; but my former success and the indifference of the dairy herd suggested that it would be perfectly safe to cast to this fish without producing a panic.

After two or three attempts this trout also was hooked. But things did not now happen according to precedent. This fish at once rushed right in amongst the cows and began to kick up a terrific disturbance. I tried to stop him, but he was too strong for me in his first rush. I was horrified. The least that could happen would be that the fish would get mixed up in the cows' legs and I should lose both fish and cast. The cows, however, didn't wait for this; they were obviously extremely annoyed at being disturbed in this manner. They disliked the crazy behaviour of this fish and quite rightly attributed it to my interference. They put back their ears and marched straight out of the river. On reaching the bank they stepped out on to the meadow and turned round to glare their annoyance at me. Their looks spoke volumes.

I netted that trout also, after a good deal of trouble; but that was the end of my sport. The cows refused to play ambush for me any more and sauntered proudly off across the grass to the farther end of their meadow.

In another river in the same district there were many dace. These frequently came up on to the shallows during the summer months. Occasionally a few could be caught when there was a breeze; but on hot, still days the only time of the day on which they could be persuaded to take the fly was when the horses were brought down to drink. The

horses stamped in the water and sent ripples rocking away far into the open, and amongst those ripples it was quite easy to tempt some of the dace which came along to feed directly they noticed the disturbance. The trouble was that the opportunity lasted only for a very short time—just long enough for one lot of horses to have their drink, return to the stable, and the second lot come down for their refreshment.

Where a boat is in frequent use it will only disturb the trout in its immediate vicinity and then only for a minute or so.

I was fishing in a small private lake in which the trout were accustomed to seeing a boat moving above them. The bottom of the lake was covered with a thick growth of weed into which the trout dived as soon as the boat was seen approaching; but directly the boat had moved elsewhere the trout started rising again in the same place. If the boat was allowed to remain still in one spot, the trout approached it fearlessly, which suggested to me that from time to time people would feed them from the boat.

Where a bridge spans a stream in an out-of-the-way place the trout dive down into the pool below, or dart up under the arches, directly your head appears above the parapet. But if the bridge is in the middle of the village street the trout take no notice whatever of the people who lean over and stare down at them from above. Many of these sophisticated village trout are extremely difficult to catch, and in course of time can often rank amongst the oldest inhabitants. Perhaps the big trout close to the wall by the second arch is not really the same fish as old George used to watch when he was a boy at school; but at any rate it is remarkably like that fish both in size and in the indifference of its manner towards its daily inspection. A shy trout may be caught; it is just a matter of keeping out of sight and going to work carefully—assuming, that is, that you time your attempt during a period of hunger. An indifferent trout will drive you near to madness, but will rarely, if ever, enter your bag by fair means.

In one place I found I could catch trout if I sat down on the shingle, but rarely if I stood upright. I don't think it had anything to do with visibility; I could catch fish quite

close in in the shallow water when I was sitting down, and I am sure they could see me quite plainly. The place was a regular picnic haunt. At week-ends in summer many people came there and lolled on the grass or sat on the shingle beside the water, and the children played in the sand and paddled in the stream. When I sat down I think the trout mistook me for one of these harmless visitors.

CHAPTER V

IMPROVEMENT OF WATERS

1. *The Value of Shade*

IT is becoming generally recognized that all living things require shade as a protection against the direct rays of the sun over prolonged periods. Though most creatures delight to bask in the sun for some portion of the day, they will not, if left to their own devices, remain basking for more than a limited time. We know the value of cover in relation to the welfare of our game birds, not only as providing hiding-places, but also as providing shade against the midday sun. Even in the rearing field, at one time the most shadeless slope in the neighbourhood, it is becoming recognized that shade must be provided in some form if the young birds are to thrive properly.

But it is not only in the rearing fields and game preserves that shade is so necessary; it is of equal importance on the river, if one is to have a proper proportion of fish in one's water. I think one may say that, as a general rule, all water under eight feet in depth should have shade in parts. How frequently we see long stretches of river entirely cleared of trees and bushes in order to make it easier to cast. I admit that the latter end is achieved; but of what use is easy casting unless there are fish to cast at? Only this summer I went over a stretch of water recently acquired by the owner, who complained that, though his pools looked better than the water below, very few salmon stayed there; whereas in his neighbour's water lower down excellent sport had been enjoyed. I pointed out that while the banks below were fringed with a plentiful growth of trimmed alders, his pools were absolutely bare, and that therefore he could only expect fish to stay in them when the water was high and coloured. There was no

question of difficulty in fishing in his neighbour's stretch, as plenty of openings had been cleared of growth, and those bushes that had been left were not allowed to grow higher than would enable an angler to pass his rod above them should it be necessary to follow a hooked fish.

I could have told him also that even in this, his neighbour's water, the best pool had been almost ruined through too drastic trimming by the former owner. At one time this pool always held anything up to ten or a dozen salmon ; but these were usually fished for from the opposite (right) bank, the fishing referred to being one bank only. The owner of the left bank decided that he must have his share of these fish, so he proceeded to clear all the bushes from the head of the pool. One tree only has been left standing at the tail, and it is beneath this tree only that one can now expect to see a salmon. A careful trimming of the tops only of the riverside growth would have made the whole pool readily accessible and still retained the shade necessary to harbour fish.

At one time I had free access to some miles of trout water in Somerset, all very heavily wooded. The fishing was not by any means easy, but with a short rod and long patience I could usually get a good basket. The property came into the market and was bought by a man with plenty of angling ambition, but little skill or knowledge. His first season was an almost complete failure. One day during the early part of the next season he met me and questioned me about the sport I had enjoyed there in the days when I was at liberty to fish the water ; he couldn't understand how I had managed to get good baskets there.

" Well," he said, " you'll be able to catch them there easily enough now, and I want you to go up and get a dozen or so for me. I've had the first half mile properly trimmed up and you won't find any difficulty in getting at the fish."

I went up and found the lower part of the stretch absolutely denuded of shade. I looked everywhere and tried many of my old favourite spots, formerly sheltered by overhanging trees, but could neither see a fish nor get a rise, except occasionally in a pool. I moved up to the part that had not

yet been "improved," and, by creeping on to the stones and crouching beneath the banks, I managed to get fifteen good fish.

I took these to the owner and, in thanking me, he said, "I'll bet you wouldn't have got that lot if I hadn't had the banks cleared up. That is water worth fishing now." When I told him that I had nothing in the first stretch, but had had to go up to the wooded part, he exclaimed in astonishment, "How on earth could you fish in that jungle?" I admitted that it was not easy fishing, and added that as he had quite ruined the lower water for the time being I should be pleased if he would allow me to go over the upper water with his man and point out exactly what should be trimmed and what left, guaranteeing that I would provide him with comfortable fishing, which at the same time would be good holding water.

On another occasion a friend bought a riverside property with a water frontage of about three hundred yards, mostly consisting of shallows, but containing two good pools. The formation of the river almost precluded the possibility of providing shade from bushes, and the formation of the river bed itself provided no holts for fish; consequently a few good baskets of trout in the spring was all that had ever been taken from it. But my friend desired salmon, and at once set about making artificial shelters of rock and cement, most of which were in the form of little breakwaters, with overhanging edges, running out at an angle from the bank; these, of course, formed a swirl in the water above the overhung shelter, and so were just the sort of spots that salmon frequently lie in for a day or two during their progress up the river. His first season yielded seven salmon, and ever since then he has caught them in varying numbers, even in the worst years.

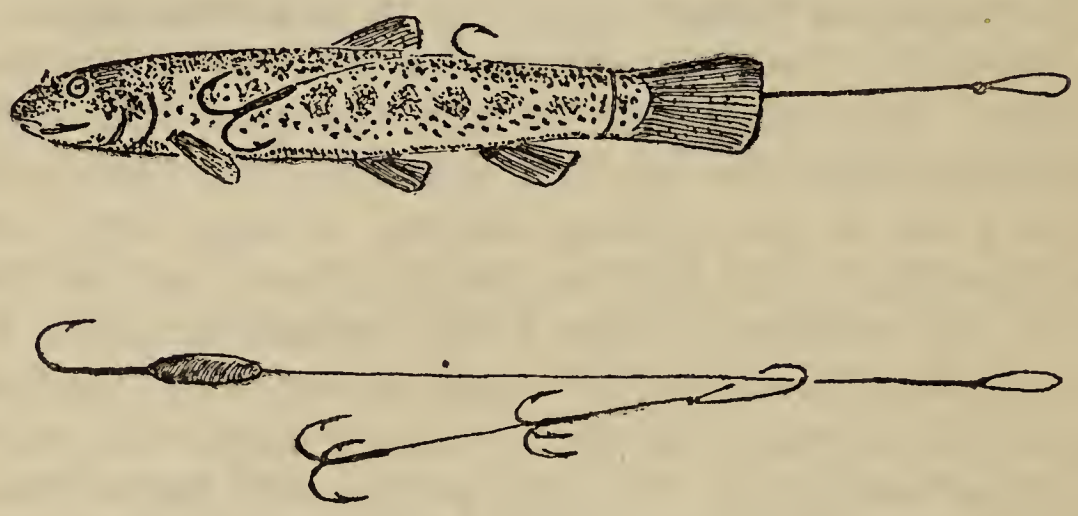
In weedy or rocky streams the question of shade on the banks is usually of little importance. Weed beds, even small ones, generally have their regular fish inhabitants; and the passage of stones and boulders down a rocky stream in times of flood carve out shelters from the bases of the rocks in which the fish can lie. But where the bed mostly consists

of stones, and the pools are of such width that boulders can roll down them during floods without being rubbed against the rocks, no weed can grow, and the bed of the stream is too regular to afford shelter, except in very deep spots. It is in such places that bank-growth is essential if one is to have a good head of fish in the water. Where trees already grow, it is only necessary to clear a few spots completely—in the average pool one at the centre and another at the tail should be sufficient—the bushes should then be cut down to such a height only as will leave adequate shelter, both to the angler and the fish, and at the same time allow the former to manipulate his rod above them ; the extent to which the bushes overhang the water should also be curtailed to the width of a few feet only. The result will be that the pool will remain a desirable residence for the fish and will have become easily fishable even to the greatest duffer. It may even become more desirable to the fish, for should it have been so densely wooded and overhung before as to exclude sunlight, it will rarely be found to contain fish whilst in that state, the position being much the same as in the case of deep, cold woods in connection with game. A handy retreat with shelter from the too-direct rays of the sun and a hiding-place from enemies, with sunlit, open spaces close at hand, is as necessary and desirable to fish as it is to game.

There is another point, too, that is too often overlooked when people get busy with the axe beside the river ; if you cut down all your trees you stand a good chance of losing most of the flies on which your fish largely depend for their food. A windy day can blow them far from the water and a night of ground frost, the sort that puts in an appearance just when your strawberry bed is full of bloom, can pretty well wipe out a generation of these frail insects, just as it can wipe out your first crop of blossom from the strawberries. If you are wise you put down straw, or some other protection, for your fruit ; and the same wisdom should make you realize that protection is equally necessary for the insects on your trout water.

2. *To Improve the Water*

Increasing age has its advantages as well as its limitations. Of late years I have found that, even if I can stay the course, I cannot really enjoy several hours' continuous fishing; not only do my limbs get tired and refuse to do what I want them to do, but the intense concentration necessary for really careful fishing (and I intensely dislike fishing carelessly myself, or even seeing others fish carelessly) is too great a strain on my



SNAP TACKLE FOR LARGE TROUT

mind unless I can relax from time to time. Consequently, in order that I may get the greatest amount of pleasure from the fishing itself, I break up the day into many resting spells, and, since complete inactivity is distasteful to me, I have adopted the practice of employing the necessary periods of rest in observing and pondering on what I see. So many anglers, I find, stop fishing and go home when they are tired or the fish won't rise. I don't. If I go out for a day's fishing it is probably only the weather that will make me return before my time is up. I may catch few fish or none, but what I fail to gain in my bag I shall more than make up for in what I gain in my knowledge of the river and the fish it contains.

During the past ten or fifteen years there has been a deplorable falling-off in trout fishing in almost all streams open to the public. The usual excuse is that they are over-fished.

Up to a point this is quite true, and at one time I was quite satisfied with this solution of the problem. But careful thought and observation has shown me that this is not by any means the whole, or even the major part, of the trouble.

For some years past I have watched the steady decline of one particular stretch of water, in spite of the fact that it is not fished to anything like the extent that it was five or six years ago. I at first began to notice that certain pools, hitherto always well stocked, began to show such a decline that it was only rarely that one could get a fish, where formerly one could count on several. It naturally followed that, in returning to one of these favoured spots and carefully fishing it—usually without result—I would sit down there to rest and smoke before moving on elsewhere. Whilst sitting there looking into the water, I began to notice things, and the experience on one occasion being repeated several times, I then began to search for the evidence of what I now felt sure was the chief cause of the depletion of the pool. I am now certain that this cause is the presence of the habitual cannibal. I use the word "habitual" intentionally, in order to make it quite clear that I distinguish between the normal cannibalism of the ordinary trout, which varies according to the time of the year, the state of the water, and the amount of other food available, and the fish that exists almost entirely on its smaller brethren.

What was at first a suspicion was soon most fully confirmed as a fact. In a stretch of water less than a mile in length I had soon located a dozen such fish that would only by a lucky chance ever be taken on a fly.

Unfortunately, owing to misplaced reverence due to knowledge resulting from observation on "Chalk-stream" trout, fishing with the fly is regarded as the only gentlemanly method by which a trout may be killed. These fish, however, will scarcely ever take a fly, either natural or artificial; and, to my way of thinking, it is better to have in a pool twenty to thirty quarter to half-pound trout that will rise to a fly, than three or four brutes from a pound and a half upwards that will fall to a fly at the rate of about one in every eight or ten years, meanwhile growing longer in tooth and jaw, and lanker

in flank, at the expense of some thousands of nice little fish which would otherwise have developed into something to delight your skill and your palate.

Night lining is the obvious remedy, but, unfortunately, it gives an opening to many abuses. There is, however, a method by which a good many of these creatures can be removed that is quite as sporting as fly fishing.

By searching under flat stones and using a child's net, obtain a few loach. Minnows will answer, but they are not as good as loach as they are not so tough, nor do they appear to be as attractive to the larger fish. One loach can often serve to capture two or three trout. Hooks-to-gut, about the size used in perch fishing, are required, and it is as well to bait two or three in readiness, the baiting being performed by threading the gut through the mouth of a dead loach by means of a baiting-needle, bringing out at the tail, and allowing the hook to rest against the gape of the bait's mouth. Use a cast of 1X or 2X gut, an ordinary trout rod, and start fishing at dusk. If loach are not available, bullheads will do, but the very best bait of all is a dead salmon smolt! . . . It is quite possible that my last suggestion has thrown some ardent salmon fisher into a fit. I am sorry if that is so, but let me remind him that every one of these precious smolts has to pass the barrier of these cannibals on its journey to the sea and thousands must perish in the attempt. I have myself seen three taken by one great trout within the space of an hour whilst I sat on a mossy bluff up above, eating my lunch and smoking a digestive pipe afterwards. Surely it is no act of infamy to sacrifice two or three for the benefit of the whole race in the river?

The method of fishing is as follows: Draw a yard or two of line from the reel and cast the bait with a somewhat slow motion, so that it takes up the slack line and falls quietly into the pool. Allow the bait to sink naturally and wait for about a minute. Then raise the rod point very carefully, and if no check is felt, move down a couple of yards and cast again. If the check is felt, halt immediately and allow the line to move off perfectly freely. Wait slightly more than a minute before drawing in the slack line till you feel the fish, then

strike immediately and don't allow the fish to have an inch of slack line until you have him in the net.

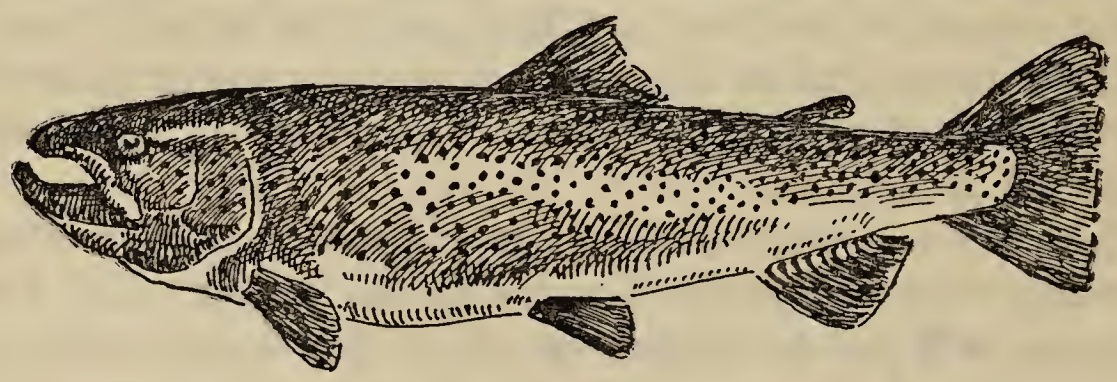
The casting may not prove easy at first. It is largely a matter of timing, and I, personally, find that it is easier to cast neatly with the rod held at half a right-angle, and so swinging the bait out, than by making the cast with the rod straight above the shoulder in the usual manner when casting with a fly. The waiting after the bait has been taken also is difficult—the time seems so very long. You will sometimes get a big eel, but you must put up with that. Your ready-baited spares will come in useful when this happens. Don't waste time and get yourself and everything in a filthy mess trying to get the hook out. Kill the eel and detach it and the hook from your cast in one piece : you can recover your tackle later on in a good light at home. Then start off again with a fresh bait and hook.

There are two good things to be claimed for this method of trouting, over and above the fun of the thing. The first is that you will get far bigger fish than you would with a fly, and the second is that you know that every fish you take has saved the lives of scores of others and given them a chance to provide you with sport to a fly later on.

A friend called on me one day and told me that his neighbour, who had a very nice stretch of fishing on a stream close to his home, had seen a trout of over two pounds in his water (the normal size was about four to the pound), but he could not get it to rise to a fly. I suggested that he should try my method with a dead loach. Some months later my friend called on me again and, in answer to my enquiry regarding the big trout, told me that his neighbour had been having a grand time with the big ones and had taken fish he had never dreamed had existed in his water. He had started off well. On his first outing he had taken three fish between a pound and a half and three pounds each. He used to go out about once a week, apart from his evenings with the fly, and scarcely ever came back without at least one outsize fish. I suppose it was three years later when the capture of a large trout in the neighbourhood happening to nearly coincide with the date of another visit from my friend, the subject of big trout again

came into the conversation. I inquired if his neighbour had noticed any improvement in his water since his exploits with his big fish. I was told that the water had improved out of all recognition and was now regarded as quite the best stretch in the district, and this without any restocking or artificial feeding.

Snap tackle may be used if one objects to having to wait a few moments to allow the trout to take the bait well into its mouth ; it has a disadvantage though, in that one is much more liable to get hung up on roots and rocks. It can be made up in various styles, using either double hooks or triangles. The principle is to have a weighted hook with gut attachment



A NON-RISER

This fish was 27 inches in length, weight 7¼ lb. and was taken from a South Devon stream. Placing the value of live trout at five pounds per hundred, calculate what it cost to produce this creature. Multiply the result by two to allow for the annual consumption of salmon smolt.

threaded through the bait and a flight of double hooks or triangles wound in spiral form on the outside. The outside flight may consist of either two or three sets of hooks. With two sets there is less to catch up in the many obstructions the bait is sure to meet with in its travels across or along a pool. I have one before me now which consists of two triangles. One of these triangles is fixed into the back of the bait on one side and the other brought over to the other side and fixed somewhere near the pectoral fin. The gut attachment to the part of the tackle which is threaded through the bait is given a half-hitch around the tail in order to prevent the bait from slipping down and the outside set is looped to this half-hitch so that it also keeps in its place. If a baiting needle is not available the tackle can be baited by passing the loop of the gut down the mouth and out at the gills of the bait.

CHAPTER VI

ABOUT FLIES AND OTHER THINGS

I. *An Unsolicited Testimonial*

I HAD a very pretty compliment paid me on my fly tying recently by a parson, who wrote me regarding a fly I had described in an article and which I recommended for use on a stream to which the parson intended paying a visit, and of which fly I had sent him a sample. I much appreciated what he had to say about my skill, but I had an even better compliment paid me a little later on—the same fly and this time by a bird.

I was really only killing time : I can't call it fishing. I had my rod with me as an excuse to dawdle by the stream during the pleasant heat. Though there were fish in the stream, the place itself was too small and overgrown to harbour sufficient trout to make it worth while fishing seriously, so I put up my special dapping fly and strolled quietly along, dropping it over the bushes wherever I could find an area of water sufficiently large to give it a chance of being seen should there happen to be a trout in that particular spot.

I had reached a place where a stretch of clear water, about a yard long by two broad, raised my hopes to an expectation of something definite happening and, as I prepared for action, a movement of the water by the rushes near me seemed to indicate that a trout had already risen to a natural fly just at that spot.

Crouching behind a small bush, I very carefully lowered the fly and commenced an up-and-down movement in the air a foot or so above the water : a method I always follow as an introduction to the drop on to the water itself, which is usually responded to at once by a rise, should a fish have been watching the hovering, descending fly. But on this occasion, before

ever I reached the final stage, another movement of the water advised me of the presence of something alive and close under me. Then, to my surprise, a moorhen swam out of the reeds and made a sudden peck at my dangling imitation of a fly.

Of course the story should end with the capture of the moorhen and the addition of yet another item to the list of my odd angling captures; but, as it happened, either the bird had taken the fly only into its beak and not the hook, or the point of the latter failed to make any impression on the creature's hard bill. At any rate, a sharp tug was followed by a violent disturbance of the water and herbage, and the moorhen splashed off downstream into some rushes, very frightened but in no way injured.

I was not really sorry that the bird had escaped. I had no wish to catch it and, had I done so, it is probable that I should either have broken my tackle or injured the bird in setting it free again—possibly both. But what I was pleased about was that my fly, which had already on many occasions proved itself to be an excellent imitation of a living insect when presented in the air to the inhabitants of the water, had now gone one better by deluding a clear-sighted inhabitant of the air itself when presented to it in the same element.

However much one may value the complimentary remarks of a fellow human being, one always feels that one must allow a little discount for such emotions as gratitude, or a sense of politeness, as the circumstances may suggest. But an instance such as the above I class as a sure indication of my skill in the delicate art of tying flies: the unsolicited testimonial so valued by everyone, whether he be a salesman, or merely, like myself, an amateur craftsman working for his own pleasure.

2. *Is "Fly Only" a Mistake?*

The greater part of our knowledge regarding the management of trout waters has been acquired through the study of such streams as are found in Wiltshire and Hampshire. It

is probable that no other country has developed such perfection of management and diversity of knowledge in this direction.

But streams and rivers rising in mountainous and frequently peaty country present very different problems. Throughout the greater part of their course they flow swiftly and are interspersed in many parts with rocks, stickles and pools of considerable depth. The waters of such streams, having an acid content (generally), are unfavourable to the development of crustaceans and shell-bearing creatures which play such an important part in the food of chalk-stream trout. In consequence, the trout in them are slow in growth and rarely exceed one pound in weight. Nevertheless, they are wonderfully sporting little fish and, while their numbers are kept up, most owners of such streams are well pleased. When the head of fish falls seriously, however, the question of management arises, and, although much good accrues from the application of what may be called "chalk-stream" methods, i.e. the introduction of food-producing plants in suitable places, re-stocking, etc., one of the commonest sources of trouble is often overlooked. I refer to the presence of confirmed cannibals.

In almost all preserved trout waters it is the practice to make "fly only" the rule. Under this system cunning and lucky fish stand a good chance of attaining considerable age and experience, if not weight. Trout are natural cannibals, and in their earlier years subsist on a mixed diet of flies, larvæ, small snails and fry, including those of both trout and salmon. As the fish grow, small creatures become less satisfying, and they depend increasingly on the capture of the smaller specimens of their own kind. In a chalk stream insect life is so abundant that quite large trout find sufficient to maintain themselves without bothering too much about pursuing small fish which can quickly take refuge in the numerous weed beds normally found in such rivers. The most cannibalistic among these chalk-stream trout cannot refrain from pursuing the mayfly in its season and may be captured with this fly. In waters less well supplied with food there is a progressive inclination for the older and larger fish to become

confirmed cannibals and the only means of capturing these fish is by the use of a live bait or a spinner, the best bait being a small trout or salmon!

To suggest the use of a trout as bait is such heresy that it is not surprising that many shudder at the thought; but a hardening of the heart is necessary if the stream is to be made a reasonable home for fly-taking fish.

It is not an exaggeration to say that in many moorland streams there are dozens of useless trout (from the fly-fisher's point of view) up to ten pounds in weight. Select those pools where ten or a dozen years ago one could always take several quarter-pounders during a good rise, but which now produce only an occasional one, and night-line them, using trout of not less than six inches in length as bait. You will probably kill one or two fish of two pounds in weight, and feel sorry they have met such an undignified end, but you will also take fish of such a size that you will be amazed how you could have failed to notice their presence.

Some time ago I walked with a friend along the banks of his stream and he remarked on the fact that, whereas at one time one could always be sure of a dozen nice trout, it was now rare to kill more than a couple in two or three hours' fishing. I told him his main pool was haunted by one or more cannibals; but he disagreed, saying that, if such were the case, they would have been seen in low water. Later on, however, trout of four pounds and ten pounds came from this pool. Assuming they required two or three trout daily, in varying sizes, to keep up their strength, it requires no great skill with figures to realize the tremendous amount of damage they did in the pool. And the presence of such fish does not affect one particular location only. Trout are seasonal travellers, moving upstream to seek spawning quarters and dropping back by degrees later, not to speak of their considerable roamings at other times. The whole stream may be paying tribute to the greed of large cannibals.

If the river is the spawning place of salmon also, I need scarcely suggest the havoc that must be wrought amongst the parr and smolts. What I have actually seen in this direction would, I am sure, enrage any ardent salmon angler. I

have referred elsewhere to one incident when I saw the disappearance of three samlets into the maw of a trout of perhaps three pounds in the course of an hour. At the time I was fishing by courtesy on "fly only" water, and so could not very well use a bait for this trout, much as I should have liked to have done so. This is only one of many such incidents which have convinced me that cannibals are the worst enemies of trout and are vastly more numerous than is usually supposed.

I broached this subject once to one of the local conservators, and, after a good deal of trouble, convinced him that I was talking of facts. The result was that he at length prevailed upon the other members of the board to agree to a day's netting. I felt that this would be very nearly useless, but dare not say anything, as at least it was a step in the right direction. The day resulted in the capture of one large fish only, and the expense was, I suppose, somewhere in the neighbourhood of five pounds. Several men had been employed and some of these had waded about in the stream and prodded under the rocks with the idea of driving the big fish into the net. But the holts of many of these fish are much too secure for this clumsy method of attack to be of any use, and the fish themselves much too cunning to be driven anywhere. In the stretch the netting party covered I had located a dozen trout from a pound and a half upwards in weight, every one of which ought to have been destroyed for the benefit of the smaller fish, the average for the stream being rather under four to the pound. Their own water bailiff, using night lines, could have caught nearly all these fish in one week, and their destruction would have been accomplished without any additional expense whatever.

In another case, after making myself thoroughly unpopular amongst the other members of the Board of Conservators, I at length prevailed upon them to authorize one of their members to set night lines baited with six or seven-inch trout. I told him the exact spots in which the lines should be set and his first attempt, when four lines were put down resulted in the capture of three trout weighing respectively four pounds, five and a quarter pounds, and seven and a

quarter pounds; whilst the fourth bait had been taken by some large fish, whether an eel or a trout could not be determined, which had got free, but which had left a fragment of its anatomy on the hook as evidence. Of the three fish taken I had known only of the smallest; so it was evident that there were still others of lesser size in the spots from which the two biggest had been taken.

The old anglers of the Tavy complained bitterly when the use of worms and suchlike baits was forbidden, saying that it would encourage the increase of the habitual cannibals. The late Mr. R. S. Austin, who for years lived at Tiverton, was a first-rate fly fisherman and the inventor of the famous "Tup's Indispensable," maintained that the introduction of the "fly-only" rule, which came about during his time in those parts, had been a blunder and that the trout-fishing had deteriorated considerably in consequence. These anglers may be considered by some to be out of date; but are they? Many of the old type of anglers were extremely good observers. They had been brought up in a quieter age than the present and had grown up with the habit of taking their fishing quietly and spending plenty of time looking about them and learning something about their quarry and its surroundings. Many modern anglers are far too hasty in their movements and in their conclusions. I am quite sure that more time spent in leisurely watching the river and quietly pondering on the results of one's observations would lead many of the moderns to realize that, though their addiction to the "fly-only" rule may be very sporting and all that, it is not altogether in the best interests of the sport they so much enjoy.

I have often toyed with the idea that if I were the owner of a stretch of water such as I have described, I would arrange an annual "cannibal" party. Of course, I should be able to afford a chauffeur and gardener, and on the day appointed I should send them off with a net to procure a good supply of live minnows. My friends would take lunch with me, and after lunch we should repair to the river, the chauffeur and gardener carrying the can of minnows, the tea and so forth, and we should spend a really enjoyable time together with our live baits tripping down under the rocky edges of the deeper

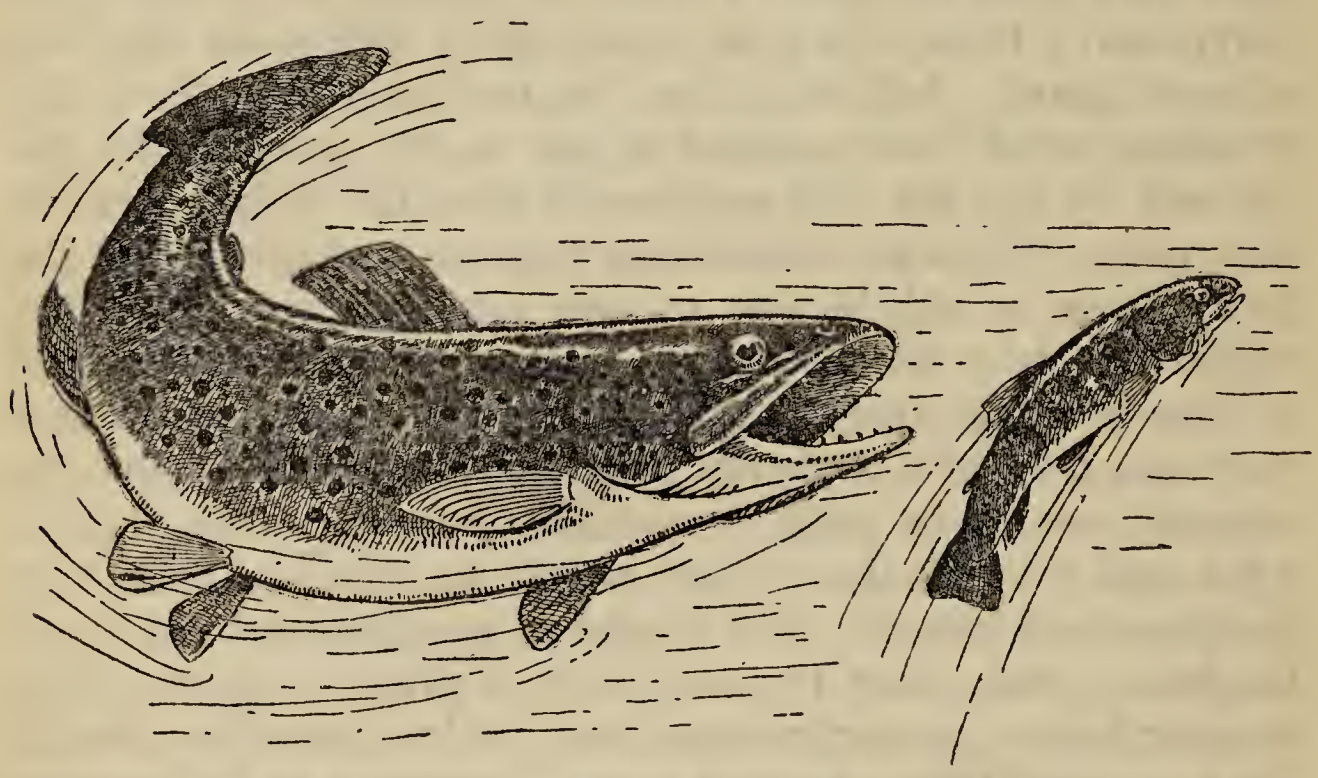
pools under bottle corks and no doubt enticing many a useless but heavy trout to its doom. The bottle corks would be preferred as floats to the more elaborate production of the tackle-makers because they would be less likely to scare the trout and would no doubt be regarded merely as drifting pieces of wood. I should be careful to avoid including "stuffy" people in my party; I should endeavour to see that all the members of it were the sort of men who somehow manage to retain a good deal of the boy about them, no matter how aged they may become. I think we should be a very jolly party, and I think also that we should be able to do the river a lot of good. And what fun the tea-hour would be! My chauffeur would have spread it out on the grass under the old oak by the big pool and would blow the whistle when it was ready. Then we would come together and spread out the fish. There would be one or two nicely-shaped trout that might have been taken on a fly, and some of the party would be able to report that they had taken one or two others that they had been able to return uninjured to the river; but the majority would be ugly, crocodilian creatures, with hungry faces and lean flanks. There would be amusing stories of successes and failures, with plenty of good-natured chaff and laughter. And, after the meal and a pipe, we should have another hour or so and perhaps two or three more undesirable fish to exhibit before packing up and returning to the evening meal. It is unfortunate that I don't happen to be the owner of such a stretch of water, nor does it seem likely that I ever shall be; I have always felt that I should so well fill such a position.

3. *Three in One*

At one time almost everyone used three flies on a trout cast; some do even now. I did so myself between thirty and forty years ago. Later on I reduced them to two, and now I use only one, and am sure I get much more pleasure by doing so, even if I may not catch so many fish, though the latter point would be difficult to prove. On the small stream in which I now do most of my trout-fishing I should have thought

that the use of three flies would be a decided disadvantage, and it was not until a couple of years ago, when I discovered a cast with three flies on it hung up in the branches of a tree, that I had any idea that anyone still continued the practice.

It was whilst thinking about these three-fly casts that the idea came to me that it might be possible to combine the advantages of three flies in one fly by making a fly that would contain in itself most of the essential features of three flies.



"A CONFIRMED CANNIBAL"

My usual three-fly cast was made up of a dark Blue Upright, a Pheasant Tail and a February Red. I took out my fly-making materials and began to hunt amongst them for suggestions for the making of this three-in-one fly. Of course, I couldn't have a dark hackle, a light hackle, and a red hackle all on one fly unless I was prepared to use a thing looking like a powder-puff. I decided that the red tint must come in elsewhere and chose a feather with a dark centre and a pale cream outer edge, a common enough feather on the necks of many barnyard fowls, for the combination of the other two tints. The body I made of light red silk with ribbing of thin silver wire.

I gave my invention its initial try-out during a short fishing holiday in South Devon and was very well pleased with the result.

When I returned home I thought it would be interesting to see if the fly answered as satisfactorily on the small stream there, and it was not long before I had an opportunity of testing it.

The first time over one's favourite water is an annual pleasure in a class by itself. The outing will bring back so many pleasant memories and there will be something to look forward to at every bend of the stream in noting the changes that have been effected in the various well-known spots by the winter's floods. I had been told that for a whole month the water had been running over the banks, so I was not at all surprised to see a great many changes. In one of the first pools I came to I noticed that a great lump of earth and roots, which had stood in the place for at least six seasons and had formed a refuge for a good many trout, had completely disappeared, leaving the pool quite bare and open and obviously not nearly such a good place in which to find a fish.

I could rise nothing of any size until I came to the corner pool at the top of the orchard. This pool has been carved out of solid rock, and I knew that it was most unlikely that it would have altered in any way. The stream comes into this pool at a sharp right-angle, and the only way to fish it successfully is to get down on the rocks at the tail, creep along in a crouching attitude, and flip the fly up into the run-in. It would be a difficult place for a young and active man to fish, and I, who am neither particularly active and certainly not young, find it extremely fatiguing. The rocks are very slippery, and the flip must be made with the cast not more than a foot above the water in order to avoid overhanging trees and with no room at all behind for the back-cast ; so, of course, I was rather disappointed when I rose a good fish which shook free almost at once. I felt that I should have had a better reward for the expenditure of so much energy and enduring so much discomfort.

Then followed several blank places until I came to the

long run under the oak trees. This is usually a pretty certain spot, and I was not surprised when I hooked a very strong nine-inch fish. I beached it on the shingle below me, and then, holding the rod steady to keep the fish from struggling back into the water again, I managed to climb over the barbed wire without tearing my clothes and collected it. The pool below, which used to hold a good many fish, but which was extremely difficult to fish on account of the trees which surrounded it on all sides, had silted up considerably, and the tree-stump in the middle had disappeared; so here again I was not surprised at not getting a rise.

For the next couple of hundred yards I got nothing worth keeping from the few fishable spots, though I missed two good ones in places where it was only possible to fish directly downstream. You may catch a good many trout fishing downstream, provided you can strike at an angle across the stream, but you will very rarely become attached to a fish in a place where you have to strike straight upstream, as was the only possible way of striking in both these places.

Then came the corner pool at the bottom of the top meadow. This pool always holds good trout and appears to be a perfectly straightforward place to fish; yet for some reason I miss eight out of ten fish which I rise in it. On this occasion I rose two very good fish and missed both.

More small fish followed until I came to a place where a fish was rising close to a large branch which stuck out of the water from a sunken tree. I missed this fish, but as I had not felt it I thought it would be worth while taking the opportunity of having my lunch close by and watching the place in case the trout should start rising again. I sat down on some shingle within easy view of the spot and started on my sandwiches. Whilst eating my food I noticed a fish rise in a very small pocket between the opposite bank and the roots of the sunken tree. The place was no bigger than an ordinary dinner plate and a most difficult spot to fish. Branches and roots stuck up in every direction and almost formed a fence as a protection against attack. But I felt it was worth the attempt. I managed to drop the fly over the roots, and it was taken at once, but I only succeeded in pricking the fish.

I resumed my meal and presently saw a trout rise several feet nearer the bushes on the other bank than the place in which the first fish had risen. I debated in my mind as to whether this would be the original fish or another. If it should be a different fish and I succeeded in capturing it, its struggles would be sure to scare the first. I considered that my best plan would be to wait a little longer so as to be more certain. I went on with my lunch and continued watching the spot. Very soon the first fish rose again in the exact spot in which it had originally shown. I at once took up my rod and, creeping carefully down, presented the fly to it and hooked it at the first attempt. This was a nice little fish of eight and a half inches. Having landed it, I moved another two or three feet farther down and cast under the bushes. The second fish took the fly as it alighted on the water and very soon joined its companion in my bag.

Having finished my lunch and smoked a pipe, I got up and continued on my way upstream. I passed a good many places that were quite unfishable owing to the growth of bushes, and at length came to an excellent spot under a tree from which I rarely fail to get a good trout. The first fish from this place was a small one and was returned, though not in quite as good a state as I could have wished. The second was no bigger, but was hooked so deeply that it bled to death in my hand and had to be kept. Then at last I was into something really worth catching. It was a grand fighter and put up a most spectacular struggle and at a tremendous pace, rushing up and down the pool and leaping in all directions till it was eventually brought to the net.

One of the objects of my outing had been to endeavour to capture a large fish which lived in a corner pool a short distance ahead of the spot I had now reached. I rose this fish three seasons ago, and last season a friend had hooked and played it for several seconds before it shook free. I had estimated its weight at a pound and my friend, two years later, had given it the same estimate, so it was fully evident that it was not the sort of fish that ought to be allowed to remain in this type of water. I approached the place with extreme caution and looked it over carefully before attempting to make a cast.

There were only two spots in which the fish would be likely to be found. I fished the first and moved nothing. My first cast into the second pitched exactly right and the fish took the fly immediately. The resulting fight was not nearly so exciting as that which the previous fish had given me. This fellow relied more upon his weight than upon any speed or skill he might have possessed; it was largely a matter of keeping cool and keeping up a steady pressure to prevent the hook getting free. But I was relieved when I had him safely in the net. He was not a handsome creature, though he had a wonderful show of large dark spots. His head was exactly a quarter of his whole length and he had a set of teeth nearly as formidable as those of a pike. He was twelve and a half inches in length and weighed twelve ounces; a trout of this length in this stream should have weighed within an ounce of a pound, but this fellow went away badly towards the tail. I believe it had actually decreased in weight during the period that had elapsed since I first met with it; on that occasion it had certainly looked a heavier and better conditioned fish. It is usually only in April that one gets the chance of taking one of these old cannibals on a fly, though just occasionally one may be taken on a moth at night during the summer months.

I now decided that I would go as far as the next corner and then pack up. This corner is a very small and exposed place, but it is overhung with brambles and roots on the far bank and generally holds a fish or two. I almost crawled into position and was rewarded with another nine-inch fish.

In passing the corner pool at the bottom of the top meadow on my way home I thought I would have one more cast—just to see if I could manage to get one fish out of it. Things seemed to be going extremely well with me; I was into a fish at once and presently had it out and into the bag. Really this had been a very much more successful outing than I had anticipated. Four sizeable fish can be looked upon as a very satisfactory bag on this stretch of the stream, and I had doubled this. I had set out to get a certain fish, and I had succeeded; and I had proved, to my own satisfaction

at any rate, that my three-in-one fly was a very good invention.

I took the short cut homewards through the big pasture, and as I walked happily along I watched a dozen or so martins and swifts whirling and diving about swiftly and gracefully overhead. They were the first I had seen for the year, and I believe the date, April the twenty-third, is the earliest record I have for the first swifts ; May the eleventh, five years ago, is the nearest I can get to it. So there has been three very pleasant items attached to the day on which I had introduced my three-in-one fly to my home waters.

When I came to clean the fish I noticed a curious thing : three of them contained spawn. Had it been late August I should not have been surprised, for one often finds well-formed spawn in trout at that time of the year. But it was quite a new thing to come across trout in this state in late April. In the case of two of the fish the spawn was about the size of turnip seed. It was not a full bag and gave no outward indication ; it was rather a thin strip, or two strips, in each fish to be more correct. In the third fish the berries began to come away fully formed as I held it in my hand. They were certainly just ripe for laying, but in number they amounted only to about a couple of dozen instead of the hundreds that should have been found in such a fish. I wondered were these cases of suppressed or delayed spawning ; or were they second spawnings ? Were they early or were they late ?

4. *Coch-y-bondhu*

I have had a good deal of correspondence and conversation recently arising from the fact that I have recommended the Coch-y-bondhu as a very satisfactory " fancy " fly. Most of my friends seem to think that I have spoken too highly of its merits ; they have not found it of much use, and some of them, I find, have ceased to include it in their fly-boxes. Several misunderstandings have arisen, and it has occurred to me that an analysis of the case may be helpful and interesting to others as well as myself.

To begin with, let me explain why I refer to this fly as a "fancy." It is said to represent the Fern-web beetle. Personally, the only resemblance I can see that it bears to the natural insect is in its colour and size; except for these two points I cannot see that it is in any way like a beetle. Furthermore, as I use it, I see very little connection between it and the Fern-web, since, under proper conditions, it may be used at periods in the year when the beetle is not in evidence and in situations where the beetle is never

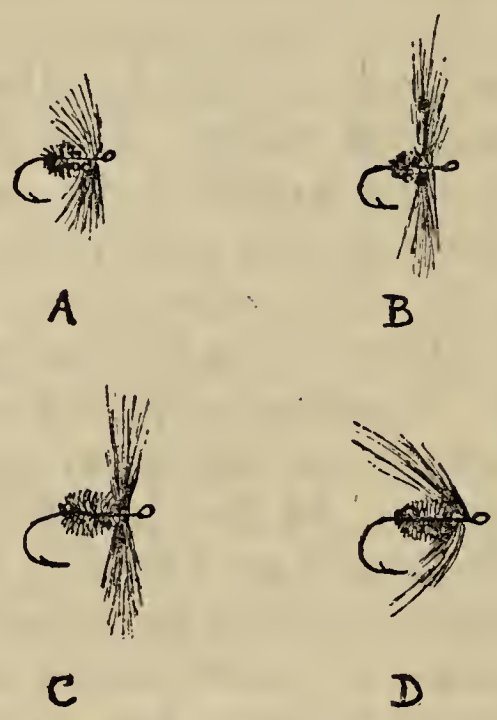


DIAGRAM OF COCH-Y-BONDHU

seen. As the usual dressing of this fly does not appear to me to resemble any species of insect, I class it amongst the "fancies."

Most of those who have discussed the merits of this fly with me have overlooked the fact that I have recommended it only under certain conditions, either when the water is peat-stained or when it is running very full. In the latter case it is almost certain to have some degree of stain in it, if only that lovely smoky green which we see in many streams when the water has cleared and is falling back after a spate; but colour is not essential provided the water is really high.

There may be some other reason why I like this fly, whilst

others will have none of it. It occurred to me when considering this point that it might be advisable to compare the usual Coch-y-bondhu with that which I make and use myself. Proceeding to do this, I discovered at once that there were several distinct differences. Whether the secret lies in these differences I am not prepared to say; all I can do is to point them out.

The first thing I notice is that in the usual Coch-y-bondhu the hackle is very much darker in colour than that which I select. I use a rich all-red hackle, similar to that used in making Soldier Palmers, Red Spinners and Wickhams. The feather I prefer is from the neck of a Rhode Island Red cock. My reason for using this is that I can see the fly, even if it has sunk a little, whereas I cannot see it when it is tied with the usual dark hackle. I find also that I use a very much stiffer hackle and that the body of my pattern is bunched much more closely than in the usual type. Fig. A shows the usual dressing; Fig. B is one of my own. Comparing them, it is at once apparent that not only is my fly much lighter in colour, but it is much less of a "blob" than the other. I cannot say whether it is the colour or the shape which is important, but I will make a suggestion. I recommend it when the water is high or peat-stained. Such conditions prevail fairly frequently in summer months after thunderstorms. At these times streams usually rise very rapidly and carry away many insects incapable of flight. Amongst them spiders must be frequent victims. I know that trout like spiders, and I suggest that my Coch-y-bondhu represents a spider, not a beetle. If this is the case you can, if you like, put me out of court by declaring that my fly cannot claim to be a Coch-y-bondhu; all I can say in defence is that it was originally intended to represent that creature.

I use my variety of Coch-y-bondhu also when chub-fishing, but tie it about twice the trout size. It is not in this case necessary that the water be either high or stained for it to be effective; I ask only for sufficient wind to ruffle the surface. I always move this fly in short jerks when chub-fishing. Fig. C shows the chub-size Coch-y-bondhu and Fig. D represents what I think it looks like to the fish as it is jerked through

the water. Most of my fly-fishing for chub has been in September or early October, a time of the year when the daddy-longlegs usually appear, and I suggest that the fish mistake the fly for this insect. No doubt you can protest again that my fly cannot claim to be a Coch-y-bondhu, to which I retort that the usual type has no more justification for its claim to represent the Fern-web beetle.

CHAPTER VII.

DRESS AND EQUIPMENT

1. *Net or Not?*

SOME time ago I was reading a book on fishing (quite a modern book) and was astounded to find that the writer absolutely condemned the use of the landing net in trout fishing. I will give him his due; he was speaking of trout fishing of the brook variety and not of the chalk stream. But even in a brook one may meet with the trout of a lifetime (as I did) and there is always a good chance of getting hold of something above the half-pound mark which it would be just craziness to attempt to lift out and probably impossible to land in any other way. Only last week I was talking to a man who fishes a little rocky stream well known to me and in which the average good trout is only a quarter of a pound. He said that he had taken his rod with him one day on business because he knew he would be passing the river on his return in the evening and thought he would spend an hour on his way home. "Of course I didn't take the net," he said, "and I hooked three lovely fish, all over half a pound and in a rather bushy place, and lost the lot just because I hadn't got a net." And a small boy with whom I chatted on the banks of that same stream only a couple of days later explained the absence of a net in his equipment because he had been told that it was unnecessary. "Don't you believe any such thing," I said to him. "NEVER be without a net. One day you will hook a real buster which you won't be able to lift out and you'll never forgive yourself."

Within a few weeks of reading the book mentioned above, I took up another modern book on fishing and therein read that a fish should always be netted head first.

I enjoyed reading both these books very much, and I picked

up quite a lot of useful information from them; so that I hope that their writers will not think me ungrateful when I say that I entirely disagree with both the statements to which I have referred.

I agree with the "no net" gentleman that a net can be a confounded nuisance. It catches in the herbage, it gets between one's legs, and sometimes it falls off and gets lost; but I submit that these are difficulties that can be overcome. I have used two types of net that have rarely caused me any trouble. One, which I used for years, was carried upside down on my back, suspended by a leather bootlace that was looped on a button of my coat, the other end of the lace passing through the handle of the net half-way down the shaft and made secure by a knot. The other net, which I now use, has a telescopic handle and is carried in a sling at my hip. The handle of the first occasionally struck against low branches, for it projected about a foot above my head. The present net has to be watched when climbing over rails; it must then be carried in front, otherwise it has a habit of slipping between the rails and pulling one up short as one drops down on the other side. But one can soon learn to avoid both these minor disadvantages.

You may object to my telescopic net on the grounds that it is liable to turn round when used in fast running water. Waders let in water if you go in over the tops; rods break if you throw them on the ground and step on them. If you take the trouble to see that the telescopic part of the handle of your net is tapered, you will also see that it is necessary to give it a sharp upwards and backwards jerk as you unship it, and this jerk will jam the handle securely. A jerk upwards after the net has been used releases the jam; in fact, my net releases itself merely by being dropped back into the ring of the sling, the slight jolt as the stop on the handle reaches the ring on the sling being sufficient to loosen it.

If you object to the extra expense of a net, why not make one yourself? All you require is a good forked stick, an ash for preference, a pair of leather bootlaces and a piece of netting —ordinary fruit netting will answer, though I always make my own nets. Drill a hole through the ends of each fork of the stick, pass one end of one bootlace through one hole, tie a knot

at the other end, thread the free end through a section of the meshes of the net and pass the lace through the other hole and knot. The remainder of the net is secured in a bag by passing a piece of cord through the meshes and spirally around the arms of the fork. The second bootlace is knotted and passed through a hold half-way up the handle ; a loop is made in the free end by which to attach it to a coat button and the net is then slung over the shoulder. It is not necessary to unbutton this net when using ; merely swing it round to the front and fling it back again when you have finished with it. I used such a net for years and, of course, because it was so inexpensive, never lost it.

In strictly moorland water one rarely meets with a fish that cannot be lifted out, unless one is fishing a river up which sea trout run. To find oneself without a net with a two-pound sea-trout on and an overhanging, two-foot bank, is too dreadful a situation for me to contemplate ; and it is this overhanging or steep bank that so often proves our undoing. It is all very well to say " beach your fish " ; but how are you going to do that if there isn't a beach ? I know of plenty of places where you can beach your trout ; on the other hand, I know of miles of water where there is not the slightest chance of doing so. Also, don't forget that a beached fish can and often will make astonishing jumps when it finds the hard stones under it, and it is just those last frenzied jumps that may free the hook and give the fish its liberty. I once saw an angler lose a beauty this way and it was almost comical to see the look of astonishment on his face ; he seemed to think that the fish, finding itself out of its element, would at once resign itself to its fate. Instead of this the apparently beaten fish suddenly took on a fresh lease of life and vigour, and it certainly knew in which direction it should hop in order to reach water.

There is also another side of the question. Good work with a net requires practice. If you do not use a net yourself, how can you go with confidence to the assistance of a brother angler in difficulties in a place he cannot himself reach ? I heard a very old and skilful angler say to a youth as he put a net into his hands : " There you are, now. Net every fish you catch, no matter if it is only three inches long. It isn't everyone who

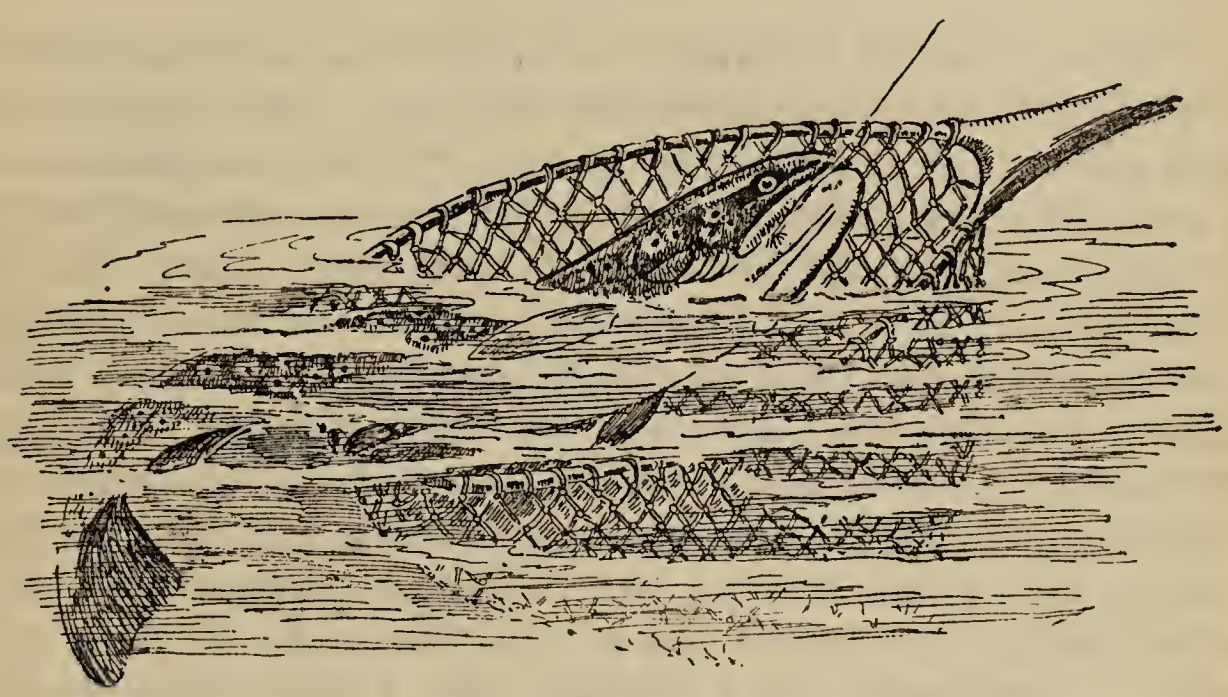
can use a net properly, and it takes some learning to do it; so take every opportunity you can get, so that you won't be flustered when you hook a fish fit for a glass case." I have said the same to my own boy. I have had good fish knocked off through the bungling of willing but incompetent helpers. They felt the loss more than I did, for they had the mortification of knowing that they were incompetent and of knowing also that they could have remedied this had they taken the trouble in the early days of their angling experience.

I never think of going out without a net, and, except when I am angling for coarse fish and am stationary (in which case the net lies beside me with its business end almost in the water), it is always on my person in an easily accessible position. Of course there have been days when I have burdened myself unnecessarily; but it has become a habit and I do not notice the additional weight. If the day is hot, I often hang my bag upon a tree; but the net remains however oppressive the weather.

Then there is the question: Should a fish be netted head-first? I say, most emphatically, "No!" More than once have I seen a good fish break away at the last moment by making a sudden dash at the sight of the net. Some people put the net into the water and bring the fish over it, raising the net when the fish is exactly within or across the ring. Very often the fish is moving, though perhaps only slowly at the time, with the result that by the time the net is raised above the water the fore-end of the fish is well clear of the ring; for a second it balances on the edge, then gives a kick and topples over outside; the sudden weight breaks the cast and another angler's yarn is born. The net should be placed in the water and the fish drawn to it, parallel to the bank if possible. As the fish crosses the net, the latter should be tilted slightly behind it and swept in the same direction as the fish is travelling, at the same time being raised. The fish cannot possibly see the net until it is completely within it. Should it then turn in an endeavour to escape, it will merely plunge into the side of the net and by this time, if the netter hasn't gone to sleep, the encompassing meshes will be travelling several yards over the grass away from the river. I slightly alter the procedure

when wading by raising the handle of the net almost perpendicularly directly the fish is within it, by this means greatly decreasing the size of the opening through which the fish may attempt to escape, and holding it kicking in a loose bag from the sides of which it can get no purchase for a spring. With the handle held horizontally, the bottom of the net (unless the bag happens to be particularly deep) forms a somewhat rigid bed from which is it not difficult for an active fish to spring upwards and perhaps to freedom.

I fancy I can now hear someone saying : " Why not see that



A CRITICAL MOMENT.

the fish is really and truly beaten before attempting to net it ? " For one thing, it is not always easy to tell exactly when a fish has reached a state when it will, or when it can, make no further attempts to escape. I can recall many instances when an apparently beaten fish has suddenly revived and to such good purpose that it has made good its escape. Also, it is always a good plan to net at the first reasonable opportunity. Many fish are very lightly hooked and the longer they remain in the water the greater the chance that they will escape. Last week I netted a fish after an exciting, but rather brief, struggle and the hook dropped out directly the fish came into the net. One more jump and that trout would have

been free. I should have been vexed at that. I had marked the fish down some days before and had hooked it as the result of really skilful stalking and casting. I wanted it particularly in order to give it to the friends with whom I was staying, and it was well above the average in size for the trout of that particular stream. I should certainly never have taken it had I attempted to land it without a net, or had I delayed longer in bringing the net into action.

2. *A Question of Attire.*

I have recorded elsewhere an account of an extraordinary individual I once met fishing on the Tavy. The man himself was odd enough in his appearance, as was his occupation when I came upon him, which was an endeavour to capture an eel on an artificial fly; but his clothing was even odder. He was wearing a frock coat, a bowler hat, and one of those washable dickies which give the appearance that one is wearing a boiled shirt. For quite a long time after this experience I thought that an artificial fly was about the most hopeless bait one could use for an eel; until one day I met a man who told me that during that same week he had taken two large eels on a fly when fishing the shallow end of a pool at night for peal. For quite a long time, also, I thought that a bowler hat was the most unsuitable sort of headgear for an angler to wear. Then I had an experience which made me doubt the wisdom of my opinion in this matter also.

Three of us had been spending a day endeavouring to entice a few trout from one of the straightest, narrowest, shallowest, clearest and most awkward little brooks I have ever come across. Originally the stream had wound a long and interesting course through delightful meadows, and around the bends and under the willows that grew in places along its banks trout could be found in situations that made it not only possible to catch them; but, by the variety of the types of holts presented, made fishing there a very delightful occupation. Then somebody came along who decided that the agricultural side of the picture could be improved. The stream was shortened

by three-quarters of its length by being turned into a canal-like cutting leading from the top bend to the lowest, and the old channel was filled in, and the willows cut down, so that a considerable addition was made to the meadows. No doubt from a commercial and food-production point of view these changes were all to the good; but much of the beauty of the place was gone and its value as a place of recreation for the angler reduced almost to nil. It may have been that it was owing to this that we were allowed to fish it.

Douglas, who was by far the most expert of the party, had taken two very nice trout, and I had had several dace and lost no less than three good trout, besides rising and failing to hook a fourth. But James had not had a rise even from a dace; so, in despair, or determination—whichever you like—he decided to put in the last hour with a worm. I left him perched above a dark and gloomy pipe, where the brook passed under a canal, and wandered off across the meadows to pick a bunch of flowers to take home to my wife. Presently I heard a shout, and, looking round, saw a hooped rod above the pipe. I tore along as fast as I could and found James battling with a good one, which was at the moment somewhere down in the pipe beneath his feet. Of course, Douglas had the net, so I raced off downstream to find him. But he was out of sight and call, so I seized my own net, which had been left in the car, and rushed back again to the gloomy pipe. There was a great collection of sticks, weeds and logs lodged against the brickwork above the entrance to the pipe, and, in trying to reach the fish, my net caught in something and broke. James then decided to go round the pool and try to get the fish up into the shallow water at the head; but in doing this he fouled the collection of driftwood and the fish remained held fast in it. Amongst the rubbish was a great log about twelve feet long and as thick as a man's thigh. Pressing the end of this against the brickwork, I managed to lever it about until, after a great deal of very hard work, I succeeded in freeing the fish. I then scrambled down the bank and endeavoured to scoop the trout out with the broken net; but this proved a failure. I dared not attempt to take the fish in my hands; I knew I should let it slip and probably break

the tackle as well, and the bank was too steep to make throwing it out a certainty. With a low bank this can often be done; all one has to do is to put a hand beyond and under the fish and grab and throw in the same movement. I have landed dozens of fish of all sorts in this manner; I have even whipped out one or two which have not been attached to a hook and line, including one very good eel. But the trick could not be tried in this case. I decided I should have to try and scoop it out with my hat.

My fishing hat is a tweed billycock. This is an excellent type of hat to wear when fishing, as it is comfortable, will stand a lot of knocking about, protects one fore and aft against sun or rain, is inconspicuous, and looks more or less right whichever way it lands on your head; but I was to find that it had its limitations.

As the fish came round on its side, I removed my hat and dipped it into the water. A tweed billycock dry will keep its shape, more or less; but the same wet is a different thing altogether. My hat collapsed into a limp rag immediately it touched the water; the mud on which I was standing was slipping out into the brook; and the water was pouring into my shoes. I had to decide quickly. I wrapped the hat around the fish and somehow managed to scramble up the bank with it to the delighted James.

We were both rather breathless after all this tense excitement and I was tremendously relieved that, in spite of all the difficulties, my part of the adventure had been brought to a successful conclusion; but, if only I had been wearing a bowler, how very much more simple it would all have been!

CHAPTER VIII

CURIOSITIES

1. *Hybrid Trout*

SOME years ago I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Berry of the Avon Biological Research. I had been mainly responsible in getting him to come and make a report on some trout water belonging to an Angling Association in which I was interested and I had offered him the hospitality of my house during his visit.

It so happened that just before his arrival I was taken rather seriously ill—I believe I went into hospital and was operated upon the day after he left. It therefore fell to my wife to entertain him during the evening and she gave him my collection of fish drawings to look at. He became so interested in some drawings of hybrid trout, and so much regretted that I was not there to talk about them, that my wife came up to me to ask if I felt well enough to have a short talk with him on the subject. I wasn't going to miss an opportunity of that nature ; and so, rather nervously and full of very real sympathy, he came into my bedroom. In a few moments I had almost forgotten pain and weakness in the enthusiasm of our conversation. And, since Dr. Berry found so much interest in my specimens, perhaps I am not assuming too much in thinking that others also may be interested.

Although students of fish have known of trout hybrids, as well as hybrids of other fish, for a great many years, I find that few anglers have seen any or at any rate few have recognized them when they have met with them.

For a great many years fishing has meant to me a great deal more than just catching fish. In most trout waters open to the public, even if it were possible nowadays to catch trout by the dozen, regulations wisely fix a limit. It seems to me,

therefore, a wise move on the part of the angler to get as much interest as possible out of each individual fish. I never put a trout into my bag without first giving it a very thorough examination and, if I find anything in its colouration, markings, or shape that strikes me as being unusual, I at once make very careful notes on the spot and a careful drawing when I get home.

I suppose that on an average I meet with one hybrid every three years. The four I propose to deal with were caught respectively in 1930, 1931 (two) and 1942, which works out exactly that average. I think that I can now in almost every case tell at once that the fish I have hooked is a hybrid immediately on making the connection. The rise may resemble

FIG. 1

the rise of either a trout or a smolt, but the play is always distinct. It is usually extremely vigorous and wilder than that of a trout, but it lacks the frantic behaviour and long, wriggling runs of the smolt.

The fish represented in Fig. 1 was taken in the Dart in 1930. It was very trout-like about the head, having a deeply-cut jaw and round spots on the gill covers. The cheeks also were chiefly yellow in colour. The anal fin had the typical markings of the Dart trout—a white outer edge with a thick black line behind it. The adipose fin was tipped with brilliant red. The body was more completely salmon-like than any I have taken—the back deep green in colour and the sides steely-blue, with numerous small X-spots. There were no light areas round any of the spots, no round spots and no red spots. The pectoral fins were dark and smolt-like; the ventral fins also were transparent and almost colourless, as with salmon smolts. The tail was dark and square in shape.

Figs. 2 and 3 also came from the Dart and were taken in 1931 and within five minutes of each other. The incident was extremely interesting to me, as I happened to have my

FIG. 2

schoolboy son with me at the time. When I hooked the first fish he at once exclaimed :

" Salmon smolt ! "

" I don't think it is," I replied.

" Bet you it is, Dad," he retorted.

" Hybrid, I believe," was my cautious answer.

And so it turned out to be ; though a hybrid with a good deal of trout in its make-up. The head had the short jaw of

FIG. 3

the smolt ; the tail fin also was deeply forked, as is the tail fin of a smolt ; but the colouring of the tail was altogether trout-like, being chiefly olive-green with crimson along the top and bottom edge. The pectoral fin was yellowish and distinctly trout-like. The anal fin also had the white and black lines of the trout. The ventral fins were clear and the adipose fin lightly tipped with crimson. The ground colour of the body was chiefly bluish-grey, and in this respect the body was very smolt-like ; but all the spots were round, all had a light circle around them and there was the suggestion of three rows of large red spots.

The second fish (Fig. 3) was taken at the very next cast, and this time my pronouncement, "Hybrid, again," was allowed to pass with merely an exclamation, "Well, I'm blowed!" The ground colour of this fish was chiefly greyish-green, but I at once detected a difference in the "texture" of the colour—if I may be allowed to use such an expression. It seemed to be less "brittle" in appearance, perhaps more "burnished."

"This fish has been in salt water," I exclaimed.

"How do you know that?" the boy asked.

"I don't know it," I answered, "but I am prepared to bet that I am right. I'll have the scales of both these fish read

FIG. 4

and you shall have this one for your breakfast; you'll find it will cut as pink as a peal."

So I took samples of the scales and cut off half one fin of the last fish with my scissors, so that there should be no mistake as to its identity when it came to the table. In sending off the scales I made no mention whatever of what I suspected. In the report were the words, "A short period in salt water." The fish had pink flesh.

The shape of the head, the ground colouring of the body, and the transparent ventral fins were the only smolt-like features about this fish. The anal fin was trout-like, and so was the pectoral. The tail fin was greenish-olive brown, shading into dull red towards the top and bottom edge. The adipose fin had a bright crimson tip. The spots were all circular, all were surrounded by a light ring, and there were about five large red spots on either side. One very curious feature was that the sides were covered with a second set of

round spots showing faintly between the black spots. The effect was as if the original design had been partly washed out and then repainted to form a different pattern.

The original of Fig. 4 was taken in the Taw and in water reached by the tide. When I hooked it I thought it was a peal. It leaped out of the water and dashed about vigorously the whole time, just as a peal would do. It did not slow up occasionally as a trout usually does. Its decided blueness also made me think it was a peal. When I had landed it and examined it more carefully, I noticed that the tail was dark and well forked; the anal fin had a white margin, but not the black line of the trout behind the white line; the pectoral fin was long and dark, almost exactly the same in relative size and appearance as the pectoral fin of a salmon smolt. The ventral fins were pale yellow, without any black or white marginal lines; but many trout in the Taw have no black and white lines on the ventral fins. Dark spots with light surrounds (typical trout spots) were clustered on the front third of the fish. These spots became smaller towards the tail, the light surrounds began to fade out, and on the tail third of the fish some of the dark spots were X-shaped. Red spots were small and dull and, with the exception of one, all were below the median line. The adipose fin was dark olive all over. Though this fish weighed nearly three-quarters of a pound, parr marks were distinct up to level with the front edge of the dorsal fin.

I have taken other hybrid trout from time to time, but I think the four I have described are the most interesting of my collection.

Hybrid trout have been produced artificially, and I understand that their appearance in many cases is of the same varied character as those which I have obtained and which have been produced without human agency. But Dr. Berry informs me that some cannot be distinguished from true trout and others look exactly like pure-bred salmon parr—he was referring, of course, to those bred under his care. Skinner, Sir Ernest Wills' river-keeper, also carried out some experiments with much the same results at Littlecote; first for Sir Ernest and later for the Avon Biological Research.

The original experiments at Littlecote were made by Crossing Rainbows and Brown Trout, and several interesting facts were discovered as the result. It was found that only the female rainbows could produce fertile ova as the result of crossing; there was no result when female brown trout were used. All the hybrids, however, were sterile. Many grew to a large size, the heaviest recorded being eleven pounds.

A considerably higher rate of fertility was reached when salmon and brown trout were crossed; but again it was the brown trout which had to be used as the male for the highest results. Fertile ova were, however, produced when a male salmon was used, but the resulting young were relatively few in number, all weakly, and all died. The salmon ova hybrids proved fertile and their descendants were later on liberated in the Kennet.

Then came crossings between sea-trout and brown trout. This cross produced a very high rate of fertile ova, and it was found that it made no difference whether a female brown trout or female sea-trout was used. The crosses in this case also proved fertile.

These experiments go a good way towards proving what has for a long time been thought to be the relationship between trout, sea-trout and salmon. It seems fairly evident that the gap is, as it has been thought to be, widest between the salmon and brown trout, and the very free fertility between brown trout and sea-trout suggests that these two species are in fact, as Tate Regan always held them to be, merely varieties of one species. The link between the two may be the so-called Slob Trout which, though it never goes right to sea, enters and lives in tidal reaches consisting very largely of salt water. I have seen fish taken from tidal waters and claimed as sea-trout which so closely resembled slob trout that really the distinction was only a matter of opinion, and I suggest that we actually have a complete series of individual fish linking the two varieties in an unbroken chain. It seems somewhat probable that it is in this manner, by gradually changing habits amongst individuals of a race, that we have the key to the original development of the many species into which many groups of animals have become divided,

and that mutations cannot claim responsibility for this to anything like the same extent as was at one time thought to be the case.

Apparently the first experiments with regard to the artificial production of hybrid trout were made in 1890 by a French investigator, M. Jousset de Bellesme, and were recorded in *La Pisiculture en France*, 1909. He states there that he did not experience any particular difficulty in crossing rainbows and brown trout. Apparently none of his hybrids proved fertile, as he makes no mention of this. Two lived until 1897, when they spawned for the first time and then died. From this M. Jousset de Bellesme concluded that hybridization brought about a delay in the sexual development and that the rapid growth seen in the hybrids may have been the result of being freed from the drain upon their physical resources which reproductions causes.

2. *Deformities*

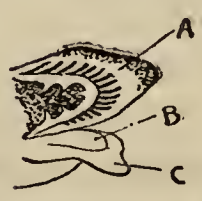
It is most unusual to meet with deformities in trout living under entirely natural conditions. This is what we should expect. When we consider the enormous number of young trout which are successfully hatched each season, it is obvious that their struggle for life must be a very severe one in which only the most perfect can have any reasonable hope of survival. Were this not the case our streams would soon become so full of fish that they would not have room enough to swim. Amongst fish which do not prey on each other we do sometimes see considerable shoals; but in the case of trout each individual fish usually occupies one particular area, and into that area none other of a lesser size dare enter. I once had what I think must have been a very unusual experience—five trout all trying to take my fly at the same time; but these were all little fellows about three inches long, and none of the party had yet grown big enough to become a danger to its companions. But in spite of the rigorous conditions which prevail to ensure that only the most perfect specimens shall grow up to become the parents of the next generation, it

does occasionally happen that one poor cripple gets away with it and, in spite of its handicaps, manages to live long enough to grow into a fish of worthwhile proportions.

The commonest type of deformity I have met with is an

DEFORMED GILL-COVERS

DEFORMED LOWER JAW AND SHORTENED NOSE



Section showing:

A. One gill-plate bent forward.
B. Position of tongue.
C. Deformed lower jaw.

LOWER JAW MISSING

incomplete development of the gill-covers. I think one may safely assume that this malformation, or want of complete deveopment, is of very minor importance and does not affect the health or activity of the fish to any great extent, and this would be sufficient to account for its comparative frequency. I have caught several trout with this deformity; also several chub and dace. In the trout, most specimens I have seen have

had only a small portion of the upper edge of the gill-covers missing, so that a minute triangle of red is visible where the gills themselves are exposed. The most pronounced case occurred in a trout I took from the Dart below Staverton. In this fish the upper curve of the posterior edge of the gill-cover on both sides of the head, as well as the whole of the upper edge of the gill-covers, were missing, thus leaving a considerable strip of the gills exposed.

My son caught a trout with a malformed lower jaw; the snout also appeared to have been shortened. On looking inside the mouth, I discovered that one gill-plate was bent forward and lying at one side of the mouth with the gill fringes pointing forwards. In spite of this apparent deformity, this fish was in excellent condition and seemed to suffer no inconvenience. My own explanation of this peculiarity is that the fish had been caught on a hook in its extreme youth and that in removing the hook the captor had handled the fish so roughly that the lower jaw had become permanently bent downwards, the snout pushed back and one of the gill-plates, in which the hook had presumably become imbedded, had been wrenched forward and had remained in that position. In spite of this, however, the American Museum of Natural History, which at that time at any rate was making a special study of fish deformities, gladly accepted the specimen as a genuine malformation.

Pug-nosed trout are, I believe, fairly frequently met with in some rivers or lakes, but so far I have not caught one.

Another recognized abnormality is a shortening of the body, with the result that the fish has an extremely ugly appearance and is quite devoid of any graceful lines. I have not yet caught a trout in this state, but I have caught a small salmon with this disfigurement, and it was quite one of the ugliest fish I have ever seen.

In most trout hatcheries you will see some curious specimens of very small trout pickled in spirits. Some have two heads, some have two tails, and others are twisted into various odd shapes. I believe all the fish I have seen in this state have been still in the alevin state with the yelk sac still attached. I don't know if anyone has ever attempted to rear any of

them, but it is almost certain that none of them could have survived more than a few weeks at most in a natural state.

I don't know if a blinded trout can be included amongst deformities, but the incident perhaps is worth recording. I was going fishing in the Upper Thames with a friend and was just about to cross Buscot Weir when I noticed a large and very black trout lying close to the wall above the foot-bridge over the side stream. I don't remember which of us decided to try and tempt it with a fly, but I do remember that the fish took not the slightest notice. I then approached to get a closer view, and saw that both its eyes were white. It was obvious that the fish was blind. We dipped the landing net into the water behind it, and it was really pathetic to notice the creature's agitation. It could probably feel the vibrations coming through the water, but it had no idea from which direction danger was approaching. It quivered all over and kept moving from side to side, though never more than a couple of inches either way. We netted it without difficulty and found that it was in a deplorable state, with scarcely any flesh on its bones. Both eyes were completely covered with a film of white fungus. It was evidently slowly dying of starvation, so we knocked it on the head.

Quite the most interesting deformity I have ever taken was a little trout of about five inches which I caught on a fly in the Dart in 1930, and this fish also came from that part of the river which lies below Staverton. This was the most beautifully-coloured trout I have ever seen. The whole of its sides right down to the belly and the ventral and anal fins were of such a brilliant orange colour that it looked like a small goldfish. It was very thickly spotted with both black and red spots. I found on taking it in my hand that, in place of a lower jaw, it had merely a fleshy knob closing the gullet. It was in this fleshy knob that the hook was fixed. My young son, who was with me at the time, pleaded for the poor little thing's life ; so, in spite of its possible value to science, after taking careful notes of its appearance and markings, I returned it alive to the river and watched it swim away to continue for a further brief spell its tremendous struggle against adversity. I sent a report of this also to the American Museum

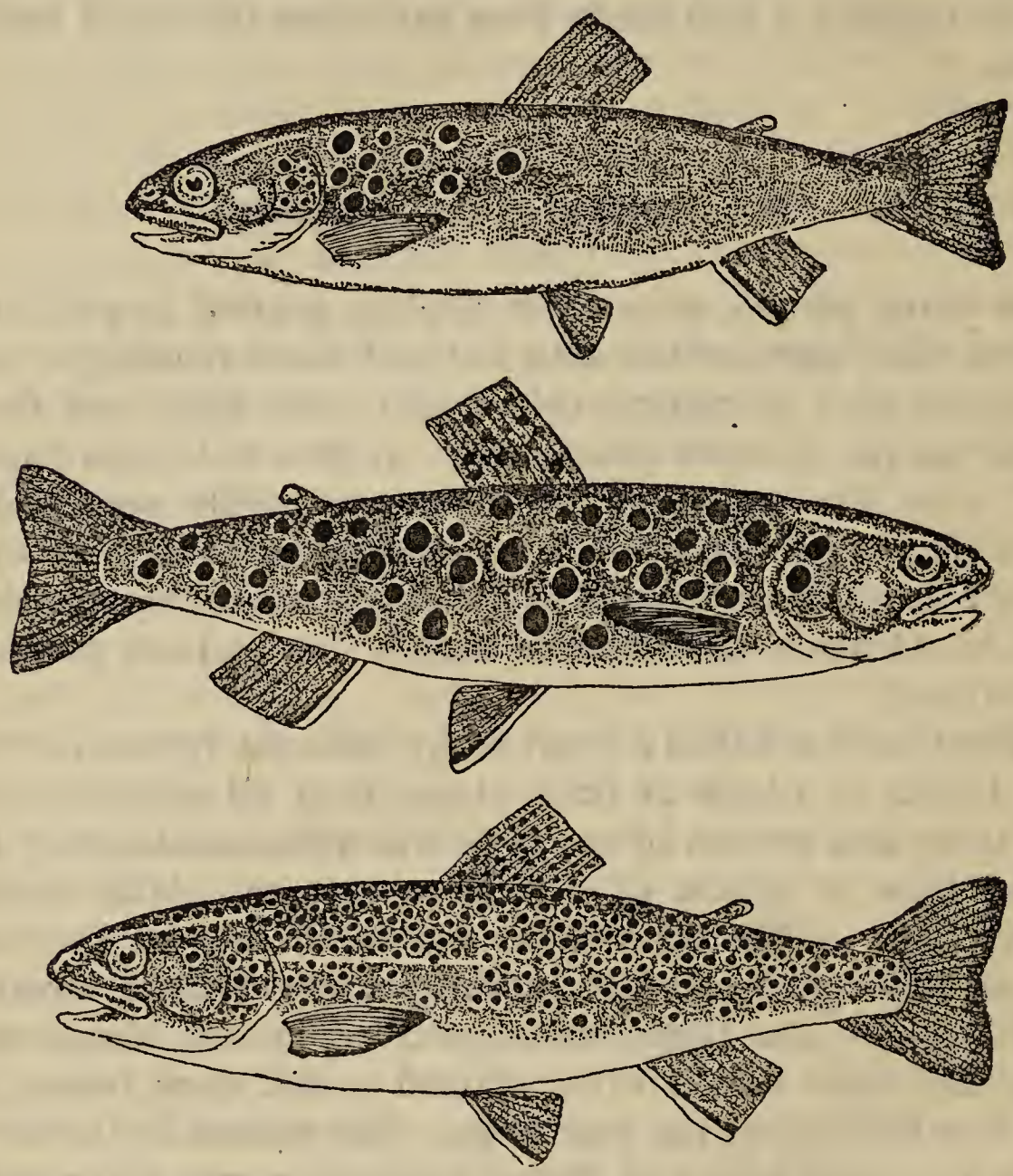
of Natural History, and they were decidedly vexed that I had allowed sentiment to prevail and had not retained and sent the fish to them. They said that they believed it was the only one of its kind that had ever been recorded. I did the best I could do under the circumstances and sent them a copy of the drawing I had made from my notes directly I reached home.

3. *Colouration and Markings*

To many people, even trout anglers, a trout is a fish with golden sides and spotted with red and black markings; some trout are dark in general colour and some light, and that is about as far as most people get. If you tell them that no two trout are exactly alike, they are mildly surprised. I have sometimes taken two trout and pointed out their differences to a fellow angler, and he has almost invariably exclaimed, "I should never have noticed that if you had not pointed it out to me."

When one has fished a great many different types of streams one begins to notice at once, if one is at all observant, that the trout in a stream of one type will differ considerably from those from a stream of a different nature. After catching many trout in the streams on the south side of Dartmoor, I had the opportunity of catching a few from a stream in Dorsetshire. The Dartmoor streams were rocky, almost weedless, and their waters often stained a rich dark brown with the overflowings of the peat bogs. The stream in Dorset rose from the chalk hills and flowed a steady course through wide meadowlands. It grew a plentiful crop of weeds and its waters were never stained with peat. The Dartmoor trout were mostly dark in general colour, sometimes, in the wooded parts, almost black; they were tough, active little fish and brilliantly spotted with dark and red spots. The Dorset trout were larger, less active, and not nearly so dark in general tone, nor were they so plentifully nor brightly spotted. Many of them were of a decidedly greenish tint, and perhaps had no more than a dozen spots on either side.

These general differences in colouration and markings are easy to see; but many people miss the differences between individual fish from the same stream. An examination of each fish as it is taken adds considerably to the interest and pleasure



VARIATIONS IN THE MARKINGS OF TROUT

of a day's fishing and brings to one's notice many little things for which no reason can be readily found. Why, for instance, do some trout have large spots, whilst others have only small spots? Why has one trout only one row of red spots, whilst the next fish taken has four rows? Why do the spots sometimes occur scattered at more or less regular intervals about the fish, whilst in other cases many of them are grouped together

in straight lines of threes? Why are the spots sometimes clustered almost entirely about the forward half of the fish? These are only a few of the peculiarities one begins to notice and wonder about. There seems to be no end to them and each season produces something fresh for me to think about and compare with what I have already seen.

The first marked difference I noticed in the trout I caught was brought about as the result of a rather crazy hour spent with my sister-in-law over a bridge-pool in a small brook in North Devon. She had come out to keep me company and, until we reached the bridge, I had provided her with very little amusement by my display of skill, or lack of it, in catching trout. The bag was quite empty and we were on our way home. The sun was just setting when we reached the bridge and I noticed many nice trout rising in the pink glow on the still waters of the little pool. Some village children were standing near and I asked them whose fishing it was in that pool. They told me that anyone could fish there. That was quite enough for me and I at once started to try my luck with the trout in the pool. I don't think those trout knew much about artificial flies and the ways of anglers. The chief difficulty was to keep the children out of the way and this Phyllis tried to do whilst I attended to the fishing. A "good time was had by all" until the children, thinking to help on the sport, went downstream and began stoning the trout in the lower parts to drive them up into the pool to be caught. This of course put "paid" to the fishing for that evening; but I had retrieved my reputation with quite a respectable number of fine little trout and we continued our way homewards with a good deal of laughter over the absurdities of the evening.

As I hauled these fish over the parapet of the bridge I noticed that they glowed as pink as the sky beyond. I thought that this was merely the reflection of the light upon their wet bodies; but on reaching home and turning out the catch I was surprised to find that the pink colours remained. All these fish were quite remarkable for the brightness of their colours. Their backs were distinctly blue, their sides as pink as the flesh of a fresh-run salmon, and the many rows of red spots glowed as brightly as the signal lamps on a railway line.

I have never met any trout since that have been so brilliant. There was a green trout which I took from the Barle at Dulverton. I was crossing the bridge one day on my way to fish the river below the town and saw a fish rise on the upstream side of the bridge. It was such a brilliant green that I knew I should be hankering after it if I went on my way without making a serious attempt to capture it. I had to spend a good deal of time before I succeeded in my attempt. This fish was as green as a rush and had very few spots on it. I have caught hundreds of trout in the Barle; but this was the only green one I ever saw. I could find no reason to account for its colour. There were no weeds growing anywhere near; but there was a sandy spot close by which might have been its resting place and which may have accounted for its light colour. Another green trout was taken from a mill leat at Barnstaple; but this leat was well supplied with patches of green weed amongst which I have no doubt the fish lived and so had accomodated its colouring to its surroundings; but it was somewhat remarkable in that it was the only green fish amongst several taken from exactly similar surroundings in the same leat.

I was leaning over Staverton bridge one afternoon when I saw a trout of a bright golden colour leap out of the water close to the left bank. It looked almost the colour of a goldfish. I went to the spot and very soon caught it. Its golden appearance was explained by the fact that it had scarcely any spots, and these spots were all collected about the shoulders and not very distinct. Taking the spots on the left side, from which I afterwards made a drawing of the fish, there were six dark spots on the gill-covers and ten only on the body itself. Four of the body-spots were red, but not the usual bright vermilion; they were rather a dull brick red colour.

Sometimes a trout will show a remarkable number of red spots. I have a drawing of one which has forty red spots on one side of the body, five on the adipose fin and ten on the dorsal fin. It also has ninety-seven dark spots on the same side of the body, including six on the gill-covers, as well as thirty-one on the dorsal fin. Another fish from the same stream has twenty-four large red spots on one side of the body and a

bright and deep red edge to the adipose fin. It has one large dark spot on the cheek, another large dark spot on the gill-cover, and eleven very large dark spots scattered about the body. The dorsal fin has a clear white line along the forward edge, then a broad dark line, and fifteen rather large dark spots scattered about the fin itself. The parr markings on this fish are very distinct on the tail half, five showing clearly and quite separately; but over the rest of the body the parr markings are blended into one blue-grey patch extending from the back to just below the median line and ending in an irregular line along the side.

A very unusual and dark fish from the Barle had thirty-six very large dark spots distributed evenly over the body and sides, taking one side only as hitherto, two large dark spots on the gill-covers, and thirteen large dark spots on the dorsal fin. In this fish none of the spots showed distinctly red; but some were redder than others. Though in very good condition, this trout had no bright colouring whatever; but was, for all that, a very handsome fish by reason of these very distinct and large spots.

Sometimes a trout will have a very large bright blue spot on the middle of each cheek, and others will have a similar large spot of a dark brown colour.

Red spots, though normally found only along the sides, at times turn up in other parts of the fish as well. I have a drawing of one which has twenty-five red spots on one side of the body, nine on the dorsal fin, two and a thin red edge on the adipose fin, and four very small but distinct red spots on the upper edge of the tail fin. I have scarcely ever found red spots on the tail fin of a trout. Another unusual feature in this fish was the complete absence of any markings on the ventral fin. In trout from the stream from which this fish was taken it is usual for both ventral and anal fins to have a white line along the forward edge and a black line behind it; but in this fish the ventral fin was a clear, pale orange brown.

One trout, taken in 1943, had a remarkable abundance of dark spots on the dorsal fin. The body itself was very sparsely spotted with dark spots, there were twelve only on the body and three on the gill-covers on one side; but the dorsal fin had

forty-three dark spots and, at the hinder edge, reaching from the back almost to the top edge of the fin, a thick, bright red line. This is the only occasion I have ever noticed a red line on the dorsal fin of a trout. I am now hoping to meet with a trout which has a red line on its body.

As a general rule, spots on a trout will be found to be very much the same size in whatever position they appear; if they are small, they will all be small, and if large, all will be large, But I have one specimen which, although the spots about the body were mostly large and rather thinly scattered, had on its dorsal fin a somewhat unique arrangement. On the lower part of the fin just above the back and towards the centre there were fourteen small dark spots; then there was a clear space which was followed by three large dark spots ranged in a straight line across the middle of the fin; then another clear space followed by a row of four small dark spots in a line close to the upper edge of the fin and extending from the extreme hinder edge to about midway.

Again, as a general rule, the red spots appear on the lower half of the fish and the dark spots towards the back; but there are occasional exceptions. One trout of which I made a drawing had dark spots over the cheeks and shoulders and reaching right down to level with the pectoral fin, no red spots appearing in this area. In the middle part of the body red and dark spots were mixed in a somewhat indiscriminate manner; some dark spots appearing very low down and well below the lowest red spots. But in the area from the adipose fin to the tail fin the position of the spots was exactly opposite to what is usually found, all the red spots being towards the upper side of the fish and three dark spots appearing in a straight line well down towards the underside of the tail and quite distinct from the red spots.

In most brook trout the ventral and anal fins have a distinct white and black line along the forward edge. Some trout carry this black-and-white marking further and show the same lines along the forward edge of the dorsal fin; but occasionally these lines are absent from one set of fins, or even from all. I have a drawing before me of a trout which has failed to produce any of these black and white lines; black,

in fact, seems to be largely lacking in its constitution as it shows only seventeen small dark spots on one side; but two of these spots show a most unusual feature in being linked together by a thin, curved black line. Its dorsal fin, however, has made up for the deficiency of black spots about the body by producing nearly fifty. There is also a group of four red spots on the dorsal fin.

Sometimes one gets hold of a trout of such remarkable brilliancy of colour, even amongst others from the same stream which are normally very brilliant, that even the most unobservant angler must pause for an instant to admire before putting the fish into the bag. In 1942 I took a thirteen-inch trout from a small stream which showed directly it was hooked that it was something out of the ordinary. I saw only the slightest dimple when it rose and, when I hooked it, I knew at once that I was attached to something pretty big. I may say that a thirteen-inch fish in this particular stream is quite exceptional; I doubt if I average one every two years. The fish kept deep down and moved slowly up the pool; for a moment or two I thought I had hooked a salmon and looked up and down stream to see if it would be at all possible to follow should the fish decide to make a dash for it to some other part of the river. Then the trout jumped and I knew at once that I had only to exercise ordinary care in order to land it, provided it did not come unstuck. But I noticed in that jump that the fish was remarkably brilliant in its colouring; it looked almost blood red! I found on examining it a few minutes later that it was indeed a very lovely thing. The back and head were a very dark olive green, the sides a burnished copper shading into a deep gold. The effect of this colouring was to almost efface the red spots, the general tone being almost equal to them. There were a good many dark spots and these were all very distinct, almost all surrounded with a light blue ring, and many of them arranged in lines of threes. Many of the red spots also were arranged in the same manner. This fish contained another trout of four inches which had been taken so recently that it was not disfigured in the slightest degree.

I have seen trout in a stream in Cornwall that were so

brilliantly yellow that we called them "canaries." Other trout in this stream were normal in colour; but from time to time we would see one or two of these bright yellow fish darting away. We found them extremely difficult to catch and spent a good deal of time over them before we succeeded in getting one. But a still more remarkable colour was mentioned in a letter to *The Field* in January, 1943 and this also came from Cornwall. This fish was described as being "milk-white but glistening—perhaps opalescent is a better description—and the red spots showed brilliantly on this background." This fish was taken from a stream that was white with the overflow from a China Clay Works. I was always under the impression that china clay killed the trout; but, if ever I am again in the neighbourhood of one of these milky streams, I shall certainly fish it in the hopes of getting hold of one of these peculiar fish.

CHAPTER IX

IN ADVERSITIES

1. *When Things Seem Hopeless*

I SUPPOSE everyone loves to be original, to tread new ground, to be a discoverer, an adventurer; and, even in the most ordinary affairs of life, opportunities frequently occur; the trouble is, though, that we usually pass them by unnoticed, through our habit of relying upon conventions and an adherence to the well worn path of custom. But, even when we do happen to be original, our originality may not really be so genuine as we think it is. The saying, "There is nothing new under the sun," may be an exaggeration, but it is probably not nearly so far from the truth as some would believe. However, to do something we ourselves have never done before and that our immediate neighbours and acquaintances have never thought of doing, is sufficiently original to give quite a spice of adventure to the affair, particularly if the incident happens to be something novel in fishing methods.

I had that pleasant feeling of discovery and adventure one day some years ago when I basketed eight lovely trout under conditions that looked quite hopeless.

If you happen to live "on the water," you just look out and, if conditions do not appear to be favourable, you put angling out of your mind and busy yourself with odd jobs about the garden. But I did not live "on the water"; so that, when I had decided to go fishing, I had to make up my mind to make the best of conditions as I should find them when I reached the river, and I can assure you that I do not travel seven or eight miles to the water to come home again without putting up my rod.

I got to the river on the day in question to find things in such a state that I was for the moment quite "stumped."

The water was like black coffee and went swirling by bearing great lumps of cream-coloured foam upon its surface. I might have had a trout or two with a worm ; but I had brought no worms with me, neither could I discover any, though I spent a good deal of time digging with stick in the few damp spots I could find. The flood had come down from the moor, twelve miles away ; the lowlands were still hard-baked as a pavement. I tried a minnow. In the runs the thing twirled on the surface, nose-diving through the waves, but never getting down to any fish. In the pools it certainly sank ; but nothing attempted to take it. I met several of the "locals." They had all the same tale to tell : "Might as well go home. Nothing whatever doing." Each man had fished for an hour or more, and had nothing whatever to show for it. This was a poser, indeed. I sat down on a slope, lit a pipe, and watched a moorhen struggling along under the other bank.

At the top end of the pool a half-submerged sallow bush pushed the stream out towards the opposite bank. Between my bank and the sallow was an area of quite still water, and, at the edge of this, where the current shot away towards the opposite bank, a great collection of suds slowly travelled round, sometimes adding to its bulk, and at others freeing masses that were swept away down-stream. The moorhen had disappeared round a corner ; so I watched the foam-clump collecting and breaking up. I watched this aimlessly in the manner in which one often watches things when one is, as it were, for the time being stranded. Neither the pool nor the foam meant anything to me ; I was just staring vacantly and wondering, in a very indolent manner, what to do and where to go to make fishing anything but a sheer waste of time. Then something slightly broke the surface between me and the foam.

A rise, by Jove ! I sat up as if I had been stung by a wasp. What on earth, or in the water, did that fish rise to, and would he do it again ? Yes, within five minutes there was a rise from another trout ; or perhaps from the same fish in a different spot. It was only a matter of seconds before my fly was floating over the place where the last trout had risen. Up came the fish, there was a swirl, and my fly remained in the same place. I tried again and the same thing happened once more.

There was no response to my third cast, nor to my fourth and fifth.

This was rather a novel problem. I sat down again; but this time to think seriously.

Presently another fish rose; but it was not a true rise to the surface; it was a swirl just beneath the surface. This gave me the idea. Obviously there were no flies on the surface or I should have seen them; but it was evident that this backwater was continually receiving supplies of drowned insects, and the trout were there taking them as they drifted round beneath the surface in the eddy beneath the heap of foam. The fish I saw from time to time were probably only occasional stragglers from the main body searching and feeding well out of sight deeper in the murky water.

I got ready for action again, and, when the next fish appeared, cast to the spot and gave the fly a sharp little jerk directly it alighted on the water. This made the fly sink, and a very slight drawing of the line gave it the appearance of drifting by beneath the surface. There was a flash of gold and the rod bent over. A real beauty, that gave me quite a few moments of anxiety before I got him into the net.

I waited patiently for the appearance of another, and that fish joined his companion in my basket.

It took me nearly two hours to do it, because I had to wait until a fish showed before I could cast again; but I rose nine trout, and got eight of them.

I admit that I was lucky in happening upon the exact type of spot in which to sit and wonder; but, if ever in the future I arrive at the river and find it again in the same condition, I intend searching with all speed for a similar spot, and shall hope to find that a repetition of my method may bring as satisfactory results as on the original occasion; in fact, I have repeated the experience several times since, and, though I have never found another lump of foam hiding quite so many good trout in feeding mood, I have been able to turn several apparently hopeless occasions into most interesting and profitable ones.

2. *Opportunity*

We had been trying for trout in the river, but could get nothing above the size limit, and very few at that. For some reason or other trout of a reasonable size were very scarce in the stretch of river available to people staying at the Guest House.

"Why don't you try the mill leat?" said our host.

"Where is it?" I asked.

"At the top of the second meadow behind the house," he replied. "Go through the garden gate and straight up across, and you'll come to it. There are plenty of trout there, and some good ones."

I had a call to make in the afternoon, and when I returned to the farm for tea I met two of the party coming up the garden path.

"We have been up to look at this mill leat," said one. "It's a washout!"

"What is it like?" I asked.

"About a couple of hundred yards of gin-clear water, about two feet deep and as flat as a pond. We walked most of its length and never saw a sign of trout or any other fish," he replied.

"A suitable place for eels, and that's about all," added the other.

"That doesn't sound very hopeful," I remarked.

We went in to tea and the rest of our party were informed of this lack of prospects of trout in the leat; then the conversation drifted into other channels.

The others decided to try for salmon in the evening. I felt that I should like to make a personal inspection of the mill leat, but did not consider that it would be diplomatic to mention this, so I settled down to letter-writing—then, when the others had gone off to the river, I put down my pen, lit my pipe and strolled across the meadows at the back of the house.

As I climbed the slope of the second meadow all I could

see before me was a high, rough bank; there was not the slightest indication of any water. Then I noticed a damp spot and a trickle coming from under the bank. I found a place with a foothold and climbed up, and there before me was a canal-like stretch of water about fifteen feet wide. I walked along the top of the bank for some distance and examined the water. It was exactly as described, except that the others had omitted to mention one feature: in places the bottom was covered with quite nice patches of short weed. "There are trout here," I said to myself. I walked still further until presently the "canal" narrowed till it was scarcely four feet in width. From the opposite bank brambles hung down, and as I watched I saw a swirl and a flash of yellow beneath them. I stood still and watched for several minutes. Another swirl appeared ahead under the brambles. I retraced my steps and stood by the wide part of the leat. Again I had not long to wait before I saw the movement of a fish by some flags. I had seen enough to convince me that our host had spoken the truth, and it was now up to me to think of a means whereby I might profit by my discovery.

Casting back in my memory over the many curious places in which I have taken good trout, I decided that what was wanted was a little colour in the water and a slight breeze.

Next morning it poured with rain, and the stream in the garden came down smoky-grey. In the afternoon a breeze sprang up and the rain ceased. The others had gone after salmon again, though their chances of success were remote, as all the fish were dreadfully stale and there was not sufficient rise in the water to allow fresh fish to come over the weir. I put up my trout rod and went up to the mill leat.

I put on a black gnat and fished wet, though I don't think it would have made very much difference what fly I used, provided it was small and sunk. I had my first fish out within ten minutes of starting, and then, having got the hang of the thing (which was to cast quite close to the flags and rushes at the sides), for a couple of hours I was kept really busy. It wasn't really easy fishing, as it was necessary to stand well down the slope of the high bank supporting

the sides of the leat and each cast had to be made with care so as to avoid the slightest suggestion of a splash. When I did make a slip and the fly landed with a rather unnatural plop, I left that spot for a few moments and returned to it again when I thought that any trout lurking in the vicinity had forgotten the incident. The most usually successful casts were those which resulted in the fly landing on an overhanging leaf and dropping into the water in a perfectly natural manner, as if it had lost its footing and tumbled in ; then would come a mighty swirl and that trout would be firmly hooked well inside its jaws.

I was late for dinner, of course, and the others were beginning to make remarks about spoiling a good meal for the sake of a minnow ; but when I asked for a plate they ceased jeering and began to sit up and take notice. I put eight good trout on the plate. " That's two each for breakfast to-morrow," I said, for I knew that the banker never had anything but a cup of tea and a slice of toast for his first meal of the day.

" The man's a wizard ! " said the stockbroker.

He might have called me something else if he had seen what was left in the bag. At any rate I sent off to my wife an even nicer lot of trout than those I had put on the plate.

Our host saw the fish when they went to the kitchen. He said to me the next day, " You're the first of my visitors that has ever been able to catch trout in that leat, and I've had the fishing there for five years."

I'm thinking there must be a good many anglers about who rarely use their powers of observation and who scarcely ever depart from rule-of-thumb methods.

It often pays to be a bit original, and I thank my stars that sometimes my normally sluggish brain wakes up sufficiently to recognize when conditions are favourable and a rare opportunity presents itself. And I get a terrific kick out of doing something nobody else has thought of doing. I am sure, if anyone came along when I happened to be successfully experimenting with a new idea and watched me unobserved, he would put me down as a harmless mental case ; I have often caught myself chuckling quietly at my own

cleverness on these somewhat rare occasions, and I know that my face wears an idiotic grin throughout the event.

Opportunity is a great thing. Don't miss it!

3. *Overcoming Difficulties*

"Don't do as I do; do as I say," might be a good opening for these remarks, for I am very conscious that much of what I have to say is not what I invariably do myself, in spite of the fact that I advise others to do it. Bad habits have grown upon me with the years, and, much as I could wish to do so, I cannot always rid myself of them. I do what I know I ought to do only on occasions and am constantly filled with regrets when I find again and again that I have forgotten something which I know well enough but which I have been too lazy to apply.

One should learn much by experience and, if one has fished for a great many years as I have done it should follow that one has learnt a great deal. It is largely a matter of observation and a capacity of thinking out things. I always feel that I ought to have learnt a great deal more than I have, and I am continually giving myself a mental kick for failing to act on some useful piece of knowledge. This is, of course, due to mental laziness and allowing actions to become habits. To allow good actions to become habits is always useful; to allow bad actions to become habits is the cause of many regrets and much misery.

I find it is becoming increasingly difficult for me to tie on flies. My eyesight is not by any means as good as it was, and it sometimes takes me a good five minutes to get the gut-end through the eye of a small hook. At one time I always held the hook up to the light, so that the eye of the hook was silhouetted against the sky. This was all very well when my sight was only slightly weaker than formerly; but when this attitude had to be maintained for several minutes I began to find it extremely fatiguing. Holding one's arms above one's head is an unnatural, or at any rate an unusual, action and the muscles soon begin to ache. Looking

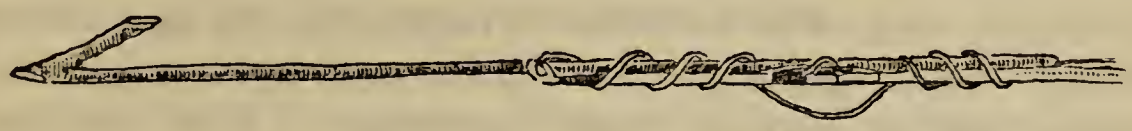
upwards at the sky also very soon makes the eyes tired. Then, quite by accident, I discovered a better and more comfortable method. My eyes and arms having become too tired to continue holding the fly up to the light and squinting at the eye, I lowered it and continued trying to find the hole by pushing at it with the end of the gut. By chance the corner of my handkerchief, a white one, was sticking out of my breast pocket and the fly came into line with it. At once I saw the eye clearly and soon had the gut through and the fly tied on. Since then I have found that the same result may be obtained by tearing off a small piece of white paper and pushing the eye of the fly through this. This method is additionally helpful also because it presses back the hackles and so keeps them out of the way of the gut.

A friend of mine always takes a length of clothes-line wound round his middle when he goes fishing. Should he find himself attached to a branch overhead he searches for a small chunk of wood, ties this to one end of his clothes-line, flings it over the branch and hauls away. He saves a good many flies and casts by this method during the season.

When I am fishing water which I know I shall visit frequently during the season, I sometimes take a small chopper with me on my first visit and cut a few long-handled hooked sticks, which I stand up in the middle of a nut bush or in some other suitable but not too conspicuous situation at various points along the stretch. When I get hung up I have only to go to one of my secret places and procure my hooked stick. It is a mistake to put the sticks in the open, as some stupid person is sure to come along and throw them into the river.

I recently discovered quite a good dodge for recovering a fly from an overhead branch. I had no hooked stick by me and no implement suitable for cutting one. I tried several dead sticks obtained from the bank of the river, but all of these were so dead that they broke at once. It looked as if I should have to break the cast, but I did not wish to do that, as the fly was a remarkably good one. I tried my hardest to hold the rod high enough to loop the line over the branch, but it was just about a foot too short. It was this nearness to success that gave me the idea. Just one foot! Surely I

could get over that difficulty? Looking at the river and thinking over the problem, I noticed a long, thin, straight stem growing upright from a low bush. I cut it off at a point where I could convert one of its lower side shoots into a hook. I then lay this twig alongside the top joint of my rod so that the hook I had fashioned was about a foot beyond



METHOD OF ATTACHING HOOKED TWIG TO ROD-TOP

the top ring. I then pulled some of the line out between the rings and wound this slack round and round both rod-top and twig until it was tight, finishing it off by looping it over one of the rings. Holding the rod upright, so that the strain would be a perfectly straight pull, I put the hook over the branch, pulled it down and freed the fly. I could perhaps have tied the twig on with a piece of string, but I had none with me.

Presence of mind and self-control, both of which qualities are definitely limited in my make-up, can get one out of a good many difficulties. When your fly hits a bush on the other side of the stream, don't try to snatch it back immediately. I usually do, and, of course, in nine cases out of ten find myself hung up. But it pays handsomely to wait a moment and let the line hang slack. Often and often the fly simply drops gently into the water and very frequently produces the desired rise. It is more difficult to follow the same rule when the fly hits an overhead branch, because in this case one is usually only aware of the mishap by the rod-top being checked firmly as it comes forward; the cast has hit the branch and the weight of the fly flings it round so that the point of the hook catches in the branch or in the cast. But now wait a minute or two, holding the cast slack until the gut dries. Very often, if the point of the hook is not actually embedded in the branch, the springiness of the dried gut will cause the gut to uncurl and the fly to drop off.

When you have been caught up on an overhead branch, examine the branches in the immediate vicinity, looking at them against the light of the sky; you may find and recover some other angler's lost tackle. My best bag for one day was four perfectly good flies and five feet of good cast.

I usually carry a pair of old secateurs in my pocket then I go fishing. They come in handy for snipping off the one overhanging twig which makes it impossible to cast through a certain small opening. Sometimes one gets caught on a bramble hanging well out over the stream. It is too sturdy to be pulled up by the cast; but often it happens that it can be snipped off at the base and steered to the bank so that the fly may be freed.

Crouching becomes very tiring and kneeling is bad for one's clothes, and, if the ground is damp, not a very wise proceeding. I had a pair of leather ferreting kneecaps given to me, and now I always carry one of these to put on when I come to an open stretch. A perfectly satisfactory kneecap can be made from a piece of sacking folded several times to form a pad about nine inches square. Sew tapes to the four corners and you have a very good and cheap article which answers almost as well as the leather cap. Such a kneecap is also very useful when one has to creep over stones in order to get at fish in an exposed part of the water; this can be a very painful operation if one has not some additional protection.

I am very fond of mushrooms and never pass any without gathering them. "A fine fish! That and half a peck of potatoes would make a very good breakfast for a man," a an old gentleman jokingly said when proudly I showed him my first small trout. A fried trout and a few potato chips make an excellent breakfast, but a fried trout and mushrooms make a better one. But mushrooms in a fishing-bag are liable to get bruised or broken. A long twig twisted into a hoop and pressed into the bottom of the bag will considerably assist in keeping the sides from pressing on the contents.

I never bother to carry a cast-damper with me now. When I wish to soak a cast, or a length of gut, I take it to a shallow part of the stream, place it in the water and put a flat stone on it, then leave it for a few minutes. The more things you

take with you, the more you have to lose or forget, and these mishaps do not add to the pleasure of one's outings.

One can get dreadfully mixed up in climbing over or through a barbed-wire fence. The best plan is to put the rod and net over first, and to put them to one side and quite clear of the place where you intend to negotiate the obstacle; they are then safe from being stepped on or knocked over, and you have both hands free to manipulate the wire.

Trout flung carelessly into the bag one on top of the other often come out in a messy state. It is a very good plan to press each fish downwards towards the vent with the finger and thumb before putting it away. This expels the contents of the gut and keeps the fish very much cleaner and sweeter.

A lot of trouble can be avoided by knowing when to cast and when to hold up for a moment. Do not cast between trees or bushes when a stiff breeze is blowing; wait for the lull which is almost sure to occur every few minutes. Also, when you wish to light your pipe on a windy day and cannot find shelter to protect your match or lighter, take off your coat, put it over you head back to front and stoop. The cavity thus formed makes a perfect protection and pipe-lighting is a simple matter within it.

When I first started trout fishing I always looked at the water first and then started putting up my rod. Often I saw the trout rising as I was doing this and my eagerness to get at them excited me so much that I bungled things, missed one of the rod rings in passing the line up through them, put the reel on with the handle on the wrong side, let the rod turn in my hand so that the line would round it at some point and even perhaps so muddle the attaching of the cast to the line that I failed to notice that it was insecure and lost the lot with the first fish I hooked. Now I prefer to put up my rod at some distance from the water; or, if for some reason I am actually on the bank, to do so with my back to the water. Having put my things together and seen that all is in order, I am then ready to see what is happening in the river itself. "More hurry, less speed," is very true in fishing as in many other things.

CHAPTER X

OURSELVES AND OTHERS

1. *Onlookers*

WHY is it that so many people, on meeting an angler, inquire of him if he has had any sport? One can understand it if they themselves are fishermen. But in this case you will notice a difference in approach; they will wait until the angler has fished out the stretch before him, or until he has raised his rod to rebait his hook before speaking. Theirs is obviously an interested inquiry. The others bawl out the remark without waiting to see if it will interrupt the angler in his occupation, and in many cases they do not wait for the reply, but go striding on their way with an air of having done a good deed by condescending to notice the poor idiot with the rod. Possibly it is merely a polite way of being rude, or a rude way of being polite, whichever you please. It may be that they really think that they have added something to the other's life by pretending to take an interest in his affairs. Whatever it is, I find it irritating. Those same people, on entering a railway carriage, would never dream of inquiring of the occupants if they were having a pleasant journey; nor would they accost a party dismounting from a car and ask if they had had an enjoyable ride; nor would they inquire of people departing from a cinema as to how they had enjoyed the show. It is only the peaceful angler who is thus inflicted.

I am not unsociable, even when I am fishing. Many of my most happy casual acquaintances have been met by the river, but nearly all of them have been fishermen. The friendships of anglers, taken on the whole, are, I believe, the truest friendships that are made. There are exceptions, of course. In Devonshire I met the most dreadful clique—a

small group of men who went out of their way to make themselves as objectionable as possible to other anglers by doing all in their power to keep them from fishing certain pools which they looked upon as their own property. It was largely owing to action on my part that the unsporting behaviour of these gentlemen (!) was eventually checked, and it was also in part due to my activities in this direction that I had the pleasure of being able to fish for a season some of the best water I have ever thrown a fly over.

At one time I spent several successive seasons on the Barle and Upper Exe. During that time I got to know nearly everyone in the district and met many very fine anglers, some in very humble stations of life. With all of these I was on excellent terms, with one exception only. What was wrong in this case I never could make out. He was one of the boys of the village—not that that was anything against him so far as I was concerned—and he was a very clever angler. When I first met him I was fishing, alone as I thought. Presently I became conscious of an "influence." I could not keep my mind on my job. I bungled my casts, missed fish, got hung up in the bushes and the bank. I moved further on. The trouble became worse. In desperation I stopped and looked round. He was standing well back behind me, and, seeing me stop fishing, came forward and asked if I had caught anything. I knew at once that he was the cause of my discomfort. I muttered "Not much," and marched straight away out of the radius of his influence. His unfortunate presence advertised itself in the same way on many occasions after this first encounter, but I always knew the symptoms, looked round to verify my suspicion and bolted at once. What he thought of my strange behaviour I neither knew nor cared; all I did know what that it was quite impossible for me to fish in peace if he was anywhere within a hundred yards of me. I can give no explanation for this strange obsession. Some may say that it was a case of the evil eye; but I know nothing of that subject, and therefore have an entirely open mind concerning it.

Speaking generally, in my own case at any rate, onlookers are not conducive to good fishing. There are, of course,

exceptions. I remember taking a peal of over a pound on a brilliant July afternoon in gin-clear and perfectly still water and in full view of my family and mother-in-law. I was fishing for trout with appropriately fine tackle, the water being much overfished Association water. I was perfectly at ease throughout the whole exciting performance and felt at its successful conclusion that I had really done something to establish the reputation of my side of the family; not that I intend to imply that my mother-in-law is traditionally critical of me and my doings. Another amusing encounter ended equally successfully. I was fishing for roach in a pool below a bridge close to my home. Presently the village butcher, a daft old idiot, and another fellow popped their heads over the parapet. Seeing me in the punt below, the butcher said to his companion, "Now you watch the young master fish. He's the cleverest young fisherman ever you did see. You watch if he don't catch a big fish in a moment." Immediately my float began to sink and I struck, hooked, played and netted the biggest roach I have ever taken—2 lb. 2 oz. "There now!" said the butcher. "What did I tell thee? You've never seed a bigger roach taken out of this river, I'll be bound; nor nobody else neither."

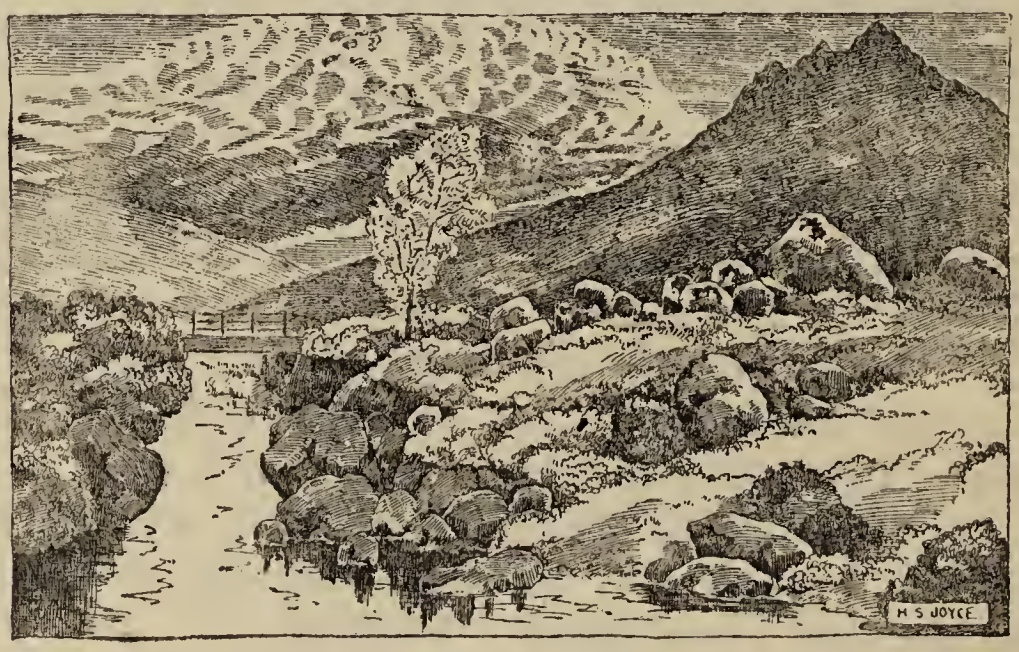
Children are often a terrible nuisance. I have permission to fish a small brook which flows near the town. I do not fish it much myself, but reserve it for my small son, to whom the very highly-educated trout of the Association water present rather too great difficulties. Our starting point and favourite pool is just outside the hedge bordering the town Recreation Ground. Sometimes we fish it and get away successfully, the children being too busy with their games to notice us. At other times we are spotted; some of the children creep through a hole in the hedge and we then have a travelling audience all the way down through the meadows. It is useless for me to implore them to stand back. I try to explain how shy the fish are and how necessary it is to keep back out of sight. I threaten with police and reports to their parents. I might just as well save my breath. The absurd part of it is that we never catch a fish after the children have put in an appearance, and therefore I cannot really understand what

pleasure they get out of it. Perhaps they wonder what we get out of it. Maybe it is merely a game of patience, and in course of time, if we can stick it out, we shall win and have the brook to ourselves. Unfortunately each year produces a fresh crop of inquisitive infants to hamper our sport.

It is not always good policy to tell others what sport one is getting if the results happen to be good. Years ago I used to fish in a canal. I had had a good schooling and knew how to find fish without much difficulty. When I first started fishing there passing anglers would stop to inquire the results. I always replied truthfully and the report was usually good. Then I began to notice that, on going to fish a chosen spot, the place was always already occupied. At first I put this down to chance misfortune, but its frequency eventually convinced me that I had become, to my own disadvantage, the authority for the district. From that time on I changed my tactics; I never fished at less than five or six spots at each outing, never remaining at one for more than half an hour at a time. This had the desired effect, for it kept everyone on the move and no one knowingly sat down at a place I had just vacated, because they assumed that my leaving it was an indication that I had found it worthless.

Some anglers can, no doubt with the best intention in the world, prove very trying. Perhaps you are down by the water for a couple of hours, all you can spare in a busy day. Along comes a holiday angler who has already had a full week of it and whose zeal is beginning to flag a little. He sits down beneath an oak and begins to ask questions. At first you are affable enough. Then he asks what fly you are using. You name it. He does not think he knows it, so you come up out of the river and show it to him. He immediately fetches out his fly-box and begins to explain its contents. A quarter of an hour has gone. He still continues to dilate on the merits of various feathered contraptions and to ask your opinion. You had hopes of fishing up to the weir and back, particularly as you wish to try again for a very good fish under the weir which you missed a few evenings ago. You will never get there at this rate, so you risk an appearance

of rudeness and break off the conversation. A week or so later, in conversation with another regular angler, you find that the visitor had described you as being "rather abrupt and not very sociable." Of course, you ought to have told him at the start that you had no time to spare; but would not that have been even ruder and less brotherly? It is not always easy to give up one's little leisure for the benefit of others, especially when you may be sure that they will



A DARTMOOR STREAM NEAR PETER TAVY

think it is they who have been conferring favours by their chattiness.

Angling requires such intensive concentration that it is better followed alone. In most cases it is better even with your chosen angling companion that he should be at least one pool distant from you when you are fishing.

2. *On the Threshold of Spring*

When the tips of elm trees begin to swell and the first bright green rosettes of hawthorn appear in the hedges, the trout-fisher's thoughts turn to the streams he loves, and, if he is wise,

he spends an evening overhauling tackle and, with the assistance of various catalogues, making a list of his requirements for the season. Soon he will be speeding north, south, or west to the mountains or moorlands of his choice. And as he looks over his flies and casts, his minnows and lines, his thoughts will be of the sparkling waters, the heathery slopes, the ferny dells, the flies dancing above the stream and the trout turning over and showing a glint of gold as they leap out of the murmuring stickles.

Many times such thoughts occurred to me when I worked in London. Sometimes it was the sight of a street hawker selling primroses that first sent my mind back to Devon or Somerset, and in the noise of the traffic I heard again the murmur of the Barle or the Exe, the Walkham or the Tavy. Sometimes it was during my daily journeys up in the train that, seeing daffodils in the gardens, I thought of daffodils by the Dart and wondered if I could get away for a day or two at Easter.

I think that really to get the best out of trout fishing of the moorland or mountain variety (and that is the type of trout fishing that falls to the lot of ninety-five per cent. of trout anglers) it is best either to live on the spot or to be so far removed from it that the outing, when it comes, is really in the nature of a great adventure when one travels to an entirely different type of country and lives for a few days amidst unaccustomed open spaces and surrounded by unaccustomed sights and sounds. In the old days I was so bursting with desire to get to the water and try my luck that, even if I did not reach my destination till nearly dark, I had to go down to the river at once. My landlord would say, "You won't catch anything after four o'clock this time of the year." But I took no notice. It was long past four o'clock, but there was still a little daylight left. And sometimes I achieved the impossible and actually brought back a sizeable trout. That first trout of the season; what a wonderful thing! Even now, after so many seasons, I get a tremendous kick every year out of my first trout.

But now let us examine our gear and see what we really require; and then let us review our methods and see if we

can get even more pleasure out of this great event, and perhaps as a result carry back with us a fuller memory of those few short days spent so near the gates of Elysium.

With regard to material. I take it that we can confine ourselves to fly tackle. Minnow fishing is all right in its way, but since one fish on a fly is usually much more fun to catch than two on a minnow, and since the fish will not be particularly fly shy at this time of the year, I think we can leave the heavier stuff at home and enjoy ourselves the more by travelling light.

To begin with, we certainly must have a few new casts. Last season's left-overs may have been kept in chamois leather or glycerine, and they may be perfectly sound; but we must remember that our natural excitement will certainly make us strike too hard at times, and it is on these outings at the beginning of the season that one so frequently hooks one of the really big fish that later on, having again learnt that flies can be nasty, dangerous things, will refuse all our efforts to entice them. How well I remember snapping off three flies in under an hour and thereby losing three fish, each just under the pound mark, one "first day" on the Dart. Of course, I was using a last season's cast, and though it had stood up well to one or two half-pounders, the shock of seeing these monsters rise had caused me to strike too violently. I might have had one of them at least had I been using a new cast.

If you want to impress any brother anglers you may meet, pack your fly box with as many varieties as it will hold, but do not try to impress your landlord or any local angler with this array of feathers and tinsel. And do not think that all this array of variations is going to increase your chances of getting fish. You may get one good fish after spending the best part of an hour over him and ringing the changes on a dozen flies. The "local" meanwhile has probably taken three or four on the ragged-looking object with which he fishes practically throughout the season. Certain streams have certain varieties that have proved themselves superior to all others; but if you can't find out beforehand what these varieties are, stick to three or four well-known types and

you won't be far wrong. As an old North Devon angler once said when asked why he had only four varieties of flies in his box and had not changed the three on his cast throughout a week of daily fishing, "Those are the four best flies I know, and if the fish don't like 'em they don't know what's good for 'em." My favourites are Blue Upright, Pheasant Tail, Half Stone, February Red and Greenwell's Glory. From time to time perhaps some other fly takes the place of one of these in my affections, but these are more or less my "stock" types. One or other of these flies will represent fairly closely any flies you are likely to see on the water in early spring, and if the colour doesn't quite match, it really makes very little difference, provided the size is about right. You will be fishing fairly broken water (though not the swiftest runs—the fish won't be in these yet) and the trout, if they happen to be rising, will be too hungry to make a close inspection before taking your lure.

Actually I believe that it is vastly more important that the fly should pitch right and come to the fish in a provocative manner, than that it should be made from the particular feather taken from a particular spot on some rather unusual bird. Even to this day the "locals" who still fish still use the same general type of home-made fly that was used on their water fifty years ago, and still hold their own with it.

You may have a passion for the dry fly. It is a pretty method of taking a trout, and, even early in the season, one can do good work with it. But for these rough streams of moor and mountain I prefer to adopt a compromise. I use a single hackle fly and I fish it wet or dry, as circumstances suggest. By fishing in this manner I can stroll along and fish all likely spots, whether fast or nearly still. This also suits my style better than the more correct straight upstream method adopted by most dry fly men. You see, I was brought up on the wet fly, and the use of the dry fly only came to my notice some years later, and after I had become almost automatic in my casting. I like to work my fly from half a right-angle above me to the same position below, so that the fly is never directly above me or directly below me. If the stream is flowing from right to left, the strike during the first half

of the area fished over is across and to the right, and when the fly has passed the half-way line the strike is then across and to the left. In neither of these cases will the fly be jerked directly out of the trout's mouth, but rather, by reason of the water pressure on the cast, will it sweep into that surest of all holds—the angle of the jaw. Of course, there are a good many instances in the course of a day's fishing when this method cannot be carried out exactly; for instance, fishing in a narrow opening between bushes is a situation in which it is usually almost impossible to strike in any other manner than directly overhead; and often it so happens that a bush to right or left makes it impossible to strike in that direction. But in fishing a moorland stream, where usually the banks are almost clear of obstruction except for a very occasional tree or bush, this is the method I prefer to adopt.

There is one point in this delightful spring fishing that rather bothers me. One is sure to get hold of one or two fish that are obviously not quite in condition. Now, ought one to put them back, or ought one to keep them? If one puts them back, one may be reasonably sure that a certain proportion will become non-risers and eventually go to swell the already over-stocked ranks of the cannibals; yet others will grow and provide us with good sport later on in the season. Some even may die, for an out of condition fish in the early part of the year has not the stamina to survive a life-and-death struggle; it may look in a fairly good state of health as it swims away after its release, but I have found such fish dead, and I do not doubt but that there are a good many that have died without being found. Some people say that fish hooked and returned are a very potent source of disease in the river. I have heard of an individual who has made a rule on his private fishing that all fish landed on his water must be kept, but that only a certain number must be kept in a day; and I am told that his fishing has improved considerably since he instituted this rule. I still conform to a size limit, but I also fix my own limit as to the number I wish to retain and stop fishing when I have reached it. After all, no one wants to go about boasting that one has taken so many dozen in a day. That was all very well in the good old days when trout

were many and anglers few; but nowadays the position is reversed and most of us prefer that others also should enjoy the sport, and that we ourselves should be able to return again to the familiar haunts with a reasonably sure belief that there will still be good fish waiting there on which we may try our skill. I am perfectly satisfied with three or four good fish as the result of an outing by the river, and I believe I should thoroughly enjoy a season just acting as

A MOORLAND PEAL POOL

guide and councillor to keen young anglers, pointing out to them the most likely spots, suggesting methods, netting the fish, and helping to get the fly out of bushes. Then, when a short period of rest was indicated, I should lean the rod against a rock and bid them sit with me awhile and admire the scenery and the birds and beasts around us. I think I could make their days very full of pleasure and their memories of them richer in consequence. In fact this is almost exactly what happened during a short holiday I gave myself this spring.

I met beside the stream a very delightful, keen and good-mannered boy, and we quickly formed a friendship. I met him almost every day, and now, looking back on the pleasures of that short holiday, I realize that quite a large part of it was made up of the time I spent with this beginner and the pleasant talks we had on our mutual hobby.

CHAPTER XI

PEAL

1. *Peal Problems*

SOON after my return from one of my many fishing holidays I met a friend who, having inquired if I had had an enjoyable time and in what manner I had occupied it, and knowing my interest in many things as well as fishing, remarked that he could not understand a man of my disposition spending so much of my leisure in such a dull occupation. As he put it: "You know how to catch fish and you admit that you often fish two or three times a week during your working part of the year, yet you spend a large part of your holiday in the same occupation. I should have thought you would have preferred a more intellectual holiday; there can be no further problems in fishing for you to solve."

Of course, my friend is not an angler. Everyone who takes fishing at all seriously knows that this subject absolutely bristles with unsolved problems, and it is just this extraordinary difficulty in finding out the rules of the game that makes it so extremely fascinating to those who look for an intellectual stimulus in their pleasures and sports.

Now, here is a problem I have just bumped into:

For more than thirty years I have fished for peal on every possible occasion, and I had begun to think that I really knew something about this delightful form of angling, but now I am beginning to doubt it. I have tried all manner of lures and methods of using them and had come to the conclusion that the most successful method was a fly dressed on a No. 11 or 12 hook attached to a light cast—points not heavier than 2X. Such a fly floats, or nearly so, and on this point I find I am in agreement with Major Dawson, who is, as I know from personal acquaintance in the past, an expert on the

matter. But at the beginning of this season three of us met and compared notes. The only one who had done anything worth talking about had been using a large fly (hook about No. 6) attached to a gut-substitute cast of salmon strength. There is precious little real darkness in June, and the reasonable argument seemed to be that a small fly and fine fishing were necessary; yet this fellow flopped out his cumbersome tackle with a splash that could be plainly seen in the summer twilight, and the peal appeared to be attracted thereby. Twenty years ago I should have agreed that the proper thing to do was to use a large fly and sink it well down, which is really what this fellow was doing.

A week or so later I met a man who, I knew, had been doing pretty well. He told me that he had been using a weighted double-hooked lure. Again, the big fly well sunk.

I thought of the light double hooked lures we used to use on the Plym, but that was near the sea—perhaps that made a difference. I inquired of someone who fishes the water four or five miles above me—ten miles or more from salt water—and found that the light double-hooked lure was quite successful there. That rather knocked the proximity to the sea theory on the head.

I decided to give small flies a rest for a time and return to the lure. I tried this creature weighted and light, but met with no success. Mark you, it was not as if I was new to the method; I used it almost exclusively for four seasons in succession some twenty years ago. I made further inquiries and found that the lures were doing nothing elsewhere; evidently I had come too late into the field. The facts seemed to indicate that the lure, or large fly, is only successful in the early part of the season. I returned to the small fly and for a month did well.

Then came my holiday in Cornwall, for which I went prepared with a plentiful supply of the aforesaid successful small flies.

I was no stranger to the water, so that the knowledge of the exact spot, so essential in peal-fishing, presented no difficulties to me. I had fished the water for the previous six or eight seasons and had found my small flies quite successful,

particularly a Jay's Wing of my own design. This year things did not seem to go quite as well as usual. Again I started asking questions, and discovered that the "locals" were using salmon flies over an inch in length! My friend happened to have some large Alexandras and we presented these to the fish. Things were none too bright with anyone, but we found that we could keep our ends up with these outsizes in flies.

Now, what do all these contradictory happenings indicate? I confess I can make neither head nor tail of it. I thought at first it might be "big flies for fresh fish," but that argument fell through owing to my success in the middle of the season with small flies, the majority of the fish then taken being quite fresh run. Visibility seems to have nothing to do with it; nor does the volume of the water. Maybe one should start the season with big flies, run down the scale to small, and return up the scale again as the season advances. But I can hit upon no satisfactory solution at present. All I can say is that I have decided that in future I will sally forth armed with four varieties of tackle: small flies on light casts; heavy flies on stout casts; a light double-hooked lure; and a weighted double-hooked lure. I shall start with the small flies and carry on through the list, and when none are successful I shall return even more convinced than I am at present that I know precious little about this fascinating but elusive fish.

And my friend imagined that fishing could present no problems to an old hand, and therefore afforded no exercise to the intellect!

2. *Sea-Trout Fishing*

I have frequently been asked what fish I consider to be the "best" to catch—meaning what fish gives most sport, weight for weight, and puts the angler to the hardest test in getting a connection and eventually landing his fish—and I have always replied without hesitation "Sea-trout." Of course, the salmon takes pride of place with many anglers, but in salmon fishing one usually uses strong rods and tackle, and it is the only exceptional fish that really causes anxiety,

whereas in sea trout fishing it is essential to use very fine tackle. I took up salmon fishing after I had had some experience with sea-trout, and was in some trepidation on account of the fearful tales I had heard of the strength of salmon. On expressing my fears to an old hand at salmon, who had caught many sea-trout in my company, I was told not to be afraid, since if I could kill sea trout on ordinary trout tackle, I could manage any salmon I was likely to meet with when using salmon tackle ; and I think on the whole his statement was correct.

I always use either fine undrawn gut or " medium trout " gut substitute for sea-trout at night. But, even with fine tackle, it is only occasionally throughout the season that one can find a day when the water is the right colour to permit of daylight fishing in the south west of England, where most of my sea-trout fishing has been done. In Wales, Scotland, the Lake District and Ireland sea-trout are not nearly so difficult to catch in daylight, and one can fish with reasonable hope of success on any day suitable for brown trout fishing. In the south-west of England one usually has to wait at the pool until the last glow of daylight has gone from the water, and the impatient angler who begins operations before darkness has settled sufficiently to completely hide his presence on the bank from the wary fish spoils his chance for the rest of the evening, as, once aware of the presence of the angler, the fish in that pool retire to the bottom and rarely condescend to feed again that evening.

In commencing to fish one should always take the rough water at the head of the pool first, and one can do this when there is just light enough to see the fly fall. In fishing this water I usually work the fly across the stream, at the same time allowing the current to take it down so that it describes a series of arcs as I work each yard of the water. The still parts of the pool and the shallow water at the tail should be left until quite dark—especially the latter, as there are frequently but a few inches of water above the fish there, so that faults in casting are easily detected by the quarry.

Sea-trout do not usually run up the rivers in any numbers, or at any rate in the rivers I know best, until nearly midsummer,

and the "schoolers," or small sea-trout of about a pound and under in weight, generally come up towards the end of July, or even later, according to the water, so that the best fishing for sea-trout is about the time that is usually considered the worst for brown trout-fishing. I have heard it said by people who have lived all their lives on a river frequented by sea-trout that the brown trout only rarely feed at night after midsummer, but this is a mistake. One does not usually catch many brown trout when fishing at night in a pool inhabited by a goodly number of sea-trout, and I think that the reason is that the larger fish in their movements about the pool terrify the smaller fish and so put them down. I have frequently made excellent catches of brown trout at night in late summer in sea-trout rivers, fishing in the part of the river above the highest pools at that time reached by the sea-trout. One or two of the latter, that may have pushed on ahead of the main body and settled in one of the higher pools, do not usually much affect the brown trout; but as soon as a large company of sea-trout make their appearance most of the brown trout seem to retire to their hovers and leave the night-feeding to their larger relatives.

I started my sea-trout fishing in water open to the public on payment of a small annual subscription, and in order to make sure of the spot in which to fish for the evening it was necessary to be there at least an hour before one could start fishing, as practically every pool was occupied each evening. I used the flies recommended by the habitual anglers of the district and fished in the orthodox manner, keeping the fly as nearly on the surface as possible, and the results were about the average for that water.

But as time went on my natural inclination to try new methods set me thinking, with the result that I discarded the usual tactics and standard flies and began to adopt flies of my own make and methods of my own invention.

With regard to the former, I am inclined to think that colour has little to do with results in night-fishing for sea-trout. The most popular flies in that district at that time were the Teal and Silver, or Silver Drake, as it was called locally (hook sizes Nos. 7 and 8), March Brown, Teal and Blue, Teal and

Yellow. After a time I came to the conclusion that the standard makes of these flies had not sufficient hackle. When I started making my own sea-trout flies I invariably used black hackles, and twice as much at least as is to be found on the makers' patterns. I believe tinsel to be a very great asset. My best two flies were (*a*) brown wings (any suitable feather—partridge, fowl, mallard, etc.), bright yellow body, silver tinsel ribbing, golden pheasant tippet tail and plenty of long black hackle, and (*b*) wings made of two cock pheasant collar feathers —white, with metallic green tips—bright yellow body, silver ribbing, golden pheasant tippet tail and the same black hackle. When I ran out of golden pheasant tippet I used a few of the black tipped strands from the breast feathers of an ordinary golden tinted cock pheasant. The latter fly was shown on its first outing to a party of four with whom I was travelling by train to the water, and when I said, in answer to the inquiry as to its name, that it was my own make and had not yet been given a name, was at once christened by a flippant member of the party the "Star Spangled Banner." They all seemed to think that I was out on a fool's errand, and I had a good deal of chaff to take with me to my selected spot. The result was five fish, all that were taken by the whole party. That fly accounted for over a score of fish before a bush claimed it, and its descendants have done equally well.

With regard to methods, I soon discarded the (possibly) floating fly and purposely allowed my flies to sink before commencing to work them. Having allowed the fly a couple of seconds to sink, I worked it steadily by short, regular jerks beneath the water, and, wherever conditions allowed it, always cast upstream and across, and worked the fly downstream towards me. The rise is rarely seen when fishing in this manner, even though the light may be just sufficient; but there is no mistake about the feel! On feeling a fish I strike immediately—except when fishing rough water downstream; striking is then hardly necessary, and I think that by doing so one is liable to snatch the fly away from the fish. I always fight my fish in as small an area of water as possible so as to avoid scaring others, using a side strain whenever fish runs too hard in any particular direction. The side strain

(bringing the rod over in the opposite direction to which the fish has taken and so allowing the play of the rod to be nearly in the same plane as the surface of the water) tends to make the fish travel in a curve instead of in a straight line, its head being pulled to one side. By this method I have frequently saved myself from being badly "bushed."

It is a good plan in night-fishing—one might almost say an essential plan—to select the spot where you intend to land your fish before darkness sets in. I always do so now, though neglect to do so in my earlier outings lost me more than one good fish through fouling unseen roots and sunken boughs.

In different localities different methods are employed for the capture of sea-trout. In some parts the silk Phantom is the favourite; others again prefer some sort of "lure"; some almost invariably use a brass minnow. I have tried them all, and I think, given some preliminary acquaintance with the water, a man will do as well with the fly, fished in the method I have indicated above, as by any of these other methods, and I am sure he will find much greater pleasure in the fishing than he would were he using the heavier and more cumbersome baits.

One final hint to the novice. Do *not* allow yourself to be persuaded into two flies. You *may* "get a trout on the dropper," but you are very much more certain of losing the best fish of the season by that dropper catching in a water-logged tree or piece of rock. I have a very painful recollection of hooking a very heavy sea-trout on my tail fly, and when I had nearly played him out, hooking a very large brown trout on the dropper *as it was travelling upstream.* The struggles of the two parted the gut between them and I landed a trout of nearly two pounds, which I had to return to the water, as the trout season had closed! Of course, if you are perfectly certain that there are no snags of any kind in the pool you are fishing, the use of two flies may not get you into any trouble; but in how many cases are we perfectly certain of what lies beneath us in the water? For my own part, I find that one fly is as much as I can control in the air in the dark. I may go along nicely for half an hour or more, using two flies on a cast; then there is an almighty splash and I reel in to find

that the whole affair is mixed up in a perfectly glorious "bird's nest." This sort of thing does not add to one's pleasure, and I prefer to be without it.

I may appear to have written as if I thought that I knew all that is to be known of this extremely fascinating branch of trout fishing. If so, I apologize. Really I know very little. Sometimes in the excitement and pride of a fresh discovery I have felt for the moment that I have discovered the last secret. But the success of the first evening is not repeated, and I begin to have my doubts. The thoughts of my old age are that the fish themselves change and that, though they may rise to one fly and behave in a certain manner one season, or in one particular place, in a couple of seasons or in another district they will perform in quite a different manner. This makes fishing for them all the more fun, for there is always the chance of making another breath-taking discovery and so adding fresh interest to the game.

3. *The Last Twenty Minutes*

When I started sea-trout fishing nearly forty years ago it was the practice to finish out a pool by going carefully over it with a Phantom Minnow. This often turned a blank evening into a success. Even if the fish had refused to rise to the fly (we were not allowed to use worm), one could usually be persuaded to grab a Phantom. In that particular water we expected heavy fish; three-, four- and five-pounders were common. Occasionally we caught one of eight or ten pounds, which called for something heavier than the usual trout rod, for a sea-trout is almost always a harder and quicker fighter than salmon of the same weight.

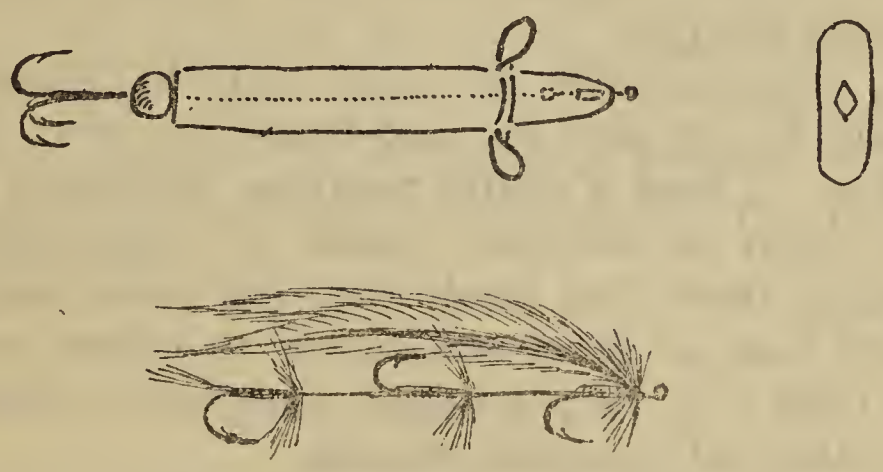
Then I moved to another part of the country where the sea-trout ran smaller, and it was more convenient to use a light trout-rod, fish for brown trout till the light failed, then put up a slightly larger fly and move to a sea-trout pool.

The lighter rod proved unsuitable for use with a Phantom. Even if one could get over the difficulty of casting, it seemed that the weapon was incapable of driving the hooks home.

The majority of fish shook off, and I felt that I should have to adopt another " finishing " lure.

It was then that I hit upon the idea of making a very light Phantom, and I selected as my material the butt end of a goose quill. I found this goose-quill Phantom a very good substitute for the usual heavier type and a reasonably safe hooker with the lighter rod.

To make them is simple enough. All you need is about two inches from the end of a goose quill, a snippet from a tobacco tin fitted to the pointed end to make it spin, and a double-hooked " Devon " flight threaded through it ; or, as I have since found equally satisfactory, a single triangle flight with a largish bead above the hook to act as a stop. My first goose quills were coloured carefully, but I have found that colouring is unnecessary after sunset, and I have even discarded the spinning fans without apparent disadvantage. It



GOOSE-QUILL MINNOW AND FEATHER LURE

has been suggested to me that the bead with the double-triangle pattern would be an improvement, and this may very well be so, but I have not tried it, as I have had no need to make up any new Phantoms. It would perhaps produce a somewhat elongated " fish," but as this might suggest a young eel, and sea-trout are very fond of young eels, this might be an additional advantage.

The illustration shows the simple method of making these lures.

These light quill minnows can be cast from a light trout-rod ; but one must remember that the action is considerably

slower than when casting a fly. Jerkiness in casting lures results in the lure hitting the water with a noisy splash several yards short of the place to which it would have travelled and slipped quietly into the water had the action remained even throughout.

Sometimes the goose quill missed fish, and I began to think that perhaps they were fish that came at the bait sideways. I felt that something might be done by looping a free triangle by a short length of gut above the quill, so that the hooks would lie about midway down the lure. I did not go very far with this experiment, for just at that time I was shown a feather lure, and made up some in various sizes and styles. They were just the thing for my purpose. In them I had a "fly" that could be cast without difficulty (though the action was slower) and which hooked in the same way as a single-hook fly. To fish it the action was much the same as that employed in wet-fly fishing, except that it was jerked slowly straight across the pool.

Another advantage this lure had over the Phantom was that it could be put into the cast-book—no extra boxes to forget or lose. I kept a couple ready on gut-substitute casts and found them an excellent means of abstracting heavy bottom feeding trout that rarely take the more usual fly. I believe these lures to be of real benefit to waters containing non-rising trout; a very common complaint nowadays in rocky moorland and mountain streams.

Feather lures are easy to make and seem to require no special materials. They should be made in various sizes from two to three inches in length. Peacock spear, as used in the Alexandra, is a favourite feather, but I do not believe it is a necessity. I ran out of peacock and took to cocks' hackles. The results appear to be equally satisfactory.

Whip three hooks of fairly wide gape, but with light irons, alternately to a length of gut. I prefer an eyed hook in front; otherwise a loop must be made in the gut, and this, in my opinion, shortens the life of the lure. It might be an advantage to whip the hooks so that they point in different directions like the hooks of a triangle; but I do not do this, as made this way they take up too much room in the tackle-

book. Dress each hook with a fairly long, soft hackle, to the front hook whip on either side a single cock's hackle of the same length as the lure. If these hackles are inclined to kick up, whip the points down to the last hook in the flight I don't think it makes much difference what colour the hackle is. I prefer a black-and-white badger, because it looks nice and is easy to get. It is as well to have one or two lures weighted with a thin strip of lead wire between the front two hooks. Sometimes the fish refuse to come off the bottom and the bait has to be sent down to them. The weighted lure is, of course, slower than the unweighted in the action of casting, a fact which requires a little concentrated attention before one gets the hang of it.

I don't really know what the trout take these lures for; probably shrimps in the case of sea-trout, and small fish in the case of brown trout. Certainly the jerky movements by which they should be made to travel through the water must make them look very much like shrimps or prawns jerking along.

It is not, in my view, advisable to *start* fishing with a lure or a quill. But for the last twenty minutes a lure fished down the pool often produces such a trout as you never dreamt dwelt thereabouts.

CHAPTER XII

MAINLY MENUS

1. *Food of Trout*

BECAUSE they fish with a fly, artificial minnow or worm, many anglers seem to think that these are almost the only things on which trout feed in their natural state. I add "in their natural state" because I suppose everyone knows that trout will eat a good many other things if they get the opportunity. I believe most of the trout in hatcheries are fed on a mixture consisting chiefly of horseflesh and meal and there is the "tame" trout we have all met which lives close to a bridge and which we feed regularly with pieces of bread. Which reminds me of a ridiculous afternoon we spent at Bibury feeding trout with pieces of Chelsea bun. We sat on the wall overlooking the stream to have our tea and one of the children threw a piece of bun into the water "to feed the fish." The piece of bun had not floated far before a trout spotted it and came after it. That started the game. We all began pulling off pieces of our buns and throwing them into the water. Trout appeared from all directions, and very soon the water was a seething mass of darting, plunging fish eagerly snapping up the food and quite regardless of the hilarious company on the wall. I suppose those same trout would have been just about as difficult to catch by orthodox methods as any you could find anywhere.

But trout do not feed, even in their natural state, exclusively, or anything like exclusively, on flies, minnows and worms. I am inclined to think that they take less of these three items than of any other of their regular foods. Flies, no doubt, are their great delight, and on them they will feed whenever they get the chance, but they can only get this chance when the flies alight on the water to lay their eggs, or fall thereon

when they have finished their egg-laying and died. Minnows in many rivers are almost entirely ignored, though in the same rivers trout may be freely taken in suitable conditions on the artificial minnow. I have seen trout at times hunting minnows. There was one big fellow which lived in our bathing pool in the Dorsetshire Stour. It was a fish of about four pounds. I never once saw this fish rise, but almost every morning it would come down out of the pool on to the shallows and hunt the minnows there. Its methods were crafty in the extreme. It would swim downstream close to a bed of weeds and then dash up the other side amongst the minnows congregated there. It seemed to know by instinct on which side the minnows would be collected. I have seen other trout in the Stour hunt minnows and I have often seen trout in the upper Thames, around Lechlade and Buscot, feeding on minnows; but I have many times seen trout in the lower Dart passing close to the shoal of minnows and not taking the slightest interest in them. And I have never once seen a minnow in any of the trout I have caught, all of which I clean myself.

My own explanation of the fact that, whereas you may catch trout on an artificial minnow in spite of the fact that you will not find them taking the live minnow, is that they think the artificial is a young trout. All trout will take young trout and in no stream of which I have had any extensive experience have I met with any exception to this rule. Over and over again I have taken a trout on a fly and found within it another trout, recently swallowed, of such a size that one would have thought its captor had put away enough food to last it for several days at least.

Another very common fish food of trout is the bullhead. I think that it is only this little fellow's habit of hiding itself beneath stones that allows it to exist in trout streams. It is in fact so secretive that in several cases I have only known of its existence in a stream by finding it in the stomachs of some of the trout I have taken.

The loach is an excellent bait for a trout, either fished by the sink and draw method or mounted on a flight and spun; yet I have never found a loach in any trout I have caught.

One very hot day I was swimming in a pool in the Barle.

The water was at its lowest and exceptionally clear. I came to rest by a ridge of under-water rocks and began to examine them carefully. I was astonished to find that every ledge had a loach resting on it. When I disturbed one of these little fish it slid off its ledge and took refuge on another. None of these fish made any attempt to get under cover; they seemed to feel perfectly secure if they were lying on the rock itself. In most cases the rock was grooved, so that the loach would be lying in a little channel, and it may have been that in this position no trout could grab it. I did not know until then that loach were at all common in the Barle; but if they were as plentiful in other parts as they were in this pool they must have been quite the most numerous species of fish in that river.

Trout are extremely fond of young eels. I did not know this until I started fishing in water touched by the tide and during the season when the elvers were running. Some of the trout I took were literally bulging with young eels; often the tails were still hanging out of their mouths. Perhaps an imitation eel, a small one, that is, spun over the haunts of a large trout might prove an irresistible bait. I have heard that the tail of a mouse is a good substitute.

During and just after a flood one will often find the stomachs of trout crammed with small water snails. Amongst the snails are often found numerous small stones. I don't think the stones are taken for any purpose; I suggest that they are snapped up in mistake for snails, and I don't suppose a trout can regurgitate anything once it has got well down inside. Trout will feed on these small water snails at any time, but it is usually only during or after a flood that they have much chance of doing so, as it is only then that the snails will be unattached to the rocks and stones. I do not suppose that a trout could pull a snail from a rock; I doubt if it would be able to take hold of its smooth and rounded shell.

In such streams as provide the right conditions for fresh-water shrimps these creatures will provide a large measure of trout food, and it is noticeable that where trout can feed on these shrimps their flesh is likely to become very much more orange, or even pink, in colour than when there are

no shrimps available. In the majority of Devonshire streams the conditions are not favourable for the existence of fresh-water shrimps. It would appear that there must be a certain amount of lime in the water to enable them to grow their horny covering; most of the Devonshire streams are acid in content and therefore definitely adverse to the production of anything based on lime. But it sometimes happens, even in Devonshire, that there may be a small stream from a limestone spring joining another of the typical acid nature. In this small stream you will almost certainly find shrimps, and the trout in it will—some of them at any rate—have very much richer-coloured flesh than those in the main stream.

Oak trees are most useful along the banks of a trout stream. When one of my sisters was teaching some small children she used to introduce a little nature study into their walks in the country. Passing an oak tree one day, she told the children that no tree had so many insects on it as an oak tree. The information was greeted with silence and one might have supposed that, like many of these well-intentioned remarks by conscientious teachers, it had gone in at one ear and out of the other without making the slightest impression. But one of the children had evidently been thinking a good deal about what she had been told, for she presently asked, "Do you think an oak tree itches much?" Whether an oak objects to its many insect parasites I cannot say, but I can certainly say that the trout which live beneath its branches wax fat on the many that fall from it into the water. Amongst a vast assortment of insects which the oak produces and almost all of which are acceptable to hungry trout, there is one that is irresistible. It is a small green caterpillar. These creatures may often be seen at the appropriate season hanging dangerously over the water by a thin silken thread. Often the thread breaks and you may be sure that caterpillar never reaches dry ground again. On some rivers the caterpillar season is looked forward to each year with eagerness by many anglers. It is then that they get their only chance of catching some of the larger fish which live in the still, deep stretches overhung by oaks and other trees. It is an interesting game

walking along quietly beside the river and dropping a hooked caterpillar between the branches of the bushes along the bank. The approach has to be made very carefully, as the trout will be close to the surface and easily scared. Often it pays to drop the bait into any likely-looking spot, even though no trout may at the moment be visible; one may be somewhere close by and will at once come out to inspect the movement it sees on the surface of the water. My nerves are not steady enough for this game, and I am usually completely worn out at the end of a couple of hours, during which period I have probably risen and missed eight or ten good fish and perhaps secured two; but I enjoy it, and am always ready to try and improve on former failures.

The presence of oak trees along the banks of a stream has often caused me to be deceived by false hopes. When the acorns are ripening they fall into the water with a plop. The situation is nearly always just the sort of place in which one would expect to find a good trout feeding. I creep in and fish the place carefully. There is no response, and presently another acorn falls with a plop. I look into the water and see the acorns lying on the bottom and know that I have been fooled again as I am nearly every season.

In a Natural History book I had when I was a boy I read that the delicate caddis worm made a little house for itself out of bits of weed, sticks and small stones as a protection against its enemies. No doubt this frail shelter does shield it from the attacks of a good many enemies; but it seems of little use against trout. Almost every trout I catch has one or two of these caddis, complete with stony case, in its stomach. I wonder all the caddis worms are not eaten by the trout; but I suppose the trout takes only those which happen to be moving when it passes, as it is only by movement that the creature may be distinguished from any small particle of stick or weed. It has been proved that most fish, trout included, are very deficient in their sense of smell. It is lucky for the caddis that this is so, as otherwise a trout would only have to pick up the scent of the caddis and could then gather them until a whole pool had been cleared. But I think that

a trout must have a certain amount of ability to detect scents as I cannot otherwise understand how it can find a worm in water as thick as pea soup, which it does without any apparent difficulty. But worms are only a flood-time food for trout, and though they may be caught on the worm in clear water (which is a pleasant and skilful manner of taking them), under natural conditions it is scarcely possible that they have much chance of feeding on them except when floods have washed them into the river.

The worm is not the only flood-bait for a trout by any means. A careful watch beside a stream at such times will disclose trout feeding from objects on the surface in quiet spots close to the bank and in eddies. I have caught many trout on the fly under such circumstances, sometimes taking them from water which has covered the grass on the banks so that the fish themselves are at the time outside the bounds of the river itself.

Maggots cannot be a common food for trout under ordinary circumstances, but they will take them readily enough when they get the chance, and should maggots get into a river at a certain spot from any particular source, trout will collect there within a very short time. I used to get a good many by fishing with a maggot just as I would with a fly in a leat just outside some works in which sheepskins were being treated. There was a wall on the opposite side of the leat and the best fish were always taken by casting the maggot against the brickwork and letting it drop into the water. This was quite unnatural, as the free maggots they obtained all came from the drainage outfall from the yard, which was beneath the surface of the water.

Amongst odd foods taken by trout I include small flatfish which I have sometimes taken from the stomachs of trout caught in water within the reach of the tides.

I have fed trout on pieces of hard-boiled egg taken from my sandwiches and dropped over the bridge on which I have been resting for my lunch; but bridge-dwelling trout often seem to have peculiar tastes, though they are as often particularly difficult to tempt with the legitimate deceits of the angler.

I have seen little to suggest that trout take vegetable food in any form as a regular diet. I should not like to say that they never do, as there is often some amount of material which might be vegetable mixed with the flies, snails and caddis in their stomachs, but which I am not a sufficiently good analyst to identify. But it certainly seems strange that nearly all trout will take bread in some form or another when it is offered. Some trout lived below a tea-garden on the banks of a river and the visitors supplied them with as much bread and buns as they could eat. They grew to a comparatively enormous size and utterly refused to look at the many flies offered to them. A fellow I knew had tried his skill on them and failed; and he really was a skilled angler! He was determined to get one of those fish and set to work to think out a scheme. He tied a small triangle hook to a short length of gut and threaded a small cube of crusty bread down the gut till it rested on the triangle. With this he could cast as he would with a fly. He very soon caught one of the trout, but he was disappointed. The fish was very heavy and fat, but not at all like the tough little fish that lived in less-favoured parts of the stream. It put up a very disappointing fight; over feeding had evidently made it short winded and flabby. I once had a similar experience with a large trout which habitually came to feed on potato peelings and such-like refuse thrown into the river from some nearby cottages. I wanted a really big trout to give to someone, and I knew this person would appreciate size more than delicacy of flavour. I went down to get this fish one night—I knew it was quite useless to attempt to do so by day. There was no doubt about what type of fish it would be; I knew that immediately I hooked it. It was like hitting a partly deflated cycle tyre. A good conditioned trout feels hard when you connect with it, and a sea trout feels harder still. This trout had a belly that was almost pendulous and as flabby as a piece of weak jelly. It was accepted with great approval and may possibly have provided a reasonably tasty meal; but I should have myself preferred one half its size and not a feeder on household garbage.

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Having written a number of things in apparent disparagement of live minnows as a food for trout, and elsewhere recommended their use as a possible means of reducing the numbers of old and useless fish in a stream, some explanation of the seeming contradiction appears to be necessary. The live minnow attached to a hook is a different proposition to a fish than the same minnow swimming free: the one is easy prey and a great temptation, the other requires an effort, and possibly a fruitless one, to capture. A perch feeding on freshwater shrimps will readily turn aside to take a minnow which it sees in difficulties, and I see no reason why a trout should not act in the same manner. Should live minnows prove a failure in my suggested onslaught on the big trout, I should certainly fall back on small live trout. I can well imagine what a chatter this would set going amongst the really respectable trout anglers, but I am afraid I am not respectable in this matter. I should consider the sacrifice of a few small trout well worth while if by so doing I could save the lives of some hundreds, perhaps thousands, of others.

2. *Sea-Trout*

Many people go to the seaside every year for their holiday with the belief that it does them good. The belief is well-founded; the salt air and the sea itself, to those not habitually accustomed to them, most certainly have a very beneficial effect on many people. I don't care very much for the seaside myself, chiefly because I find the glare so trying; I get irritable and develop headaches. Some trout go to sea every year. At one time they were regarded as a separate species, but now it is generally accepted that they are merely a variety —a group, as it were, or perhaps often merely individuals, which have made a habit of spending part of each year in salt water. If they could get over the difficulty of having to spawn in fresh water and individuals could produce eggs which would develop in salt water, it is possible that a race of wholly marine trout would arise. This habit of going to sea has a tremendous effect on the vitality of the fish; sea-trout are

relatively, and particularly when fresh in from the salt water, about the most active fish to be found in fresh water. I class them well in front of salmon in this respect. A salmon, when hooked, often wanders about in a rather aimless sort of manner, giving an occasional sideways plunge and spending a considerable amount of time apparently thinking what to do next. If the river is running very full you will probably have some difficulty in getting him out ; but this is chiefly because of his weight and the pressure the swift water can exert on his great body. A sea-trout rarely gives you any quiet moments from the time it is hooked to the time it is either lost or taken out. It sometimes seems to go quite mad, leaping, dashing and struggling without a pause until it is completely exhausted. Fresh in from the sea, it is like a human being fresh back to work from a seaside holiday, full of energy and health. What it lives on in the sea I do not know, but I understand that its food there consists largely of prawns, sand-eels and small fish.

As if in confirmation of the present day idea that sea-trout are nothing more than a variety of the ordinary river, or brown trout, we get an interesting sequence of events following the introduction of brown trout into Tasmania. There were no trout in those water until brown trout were introduced about the year 1900 ; nor were there any sea-trout. In some of the Tasmanian rivers there is an annual run of small fish known as "silver bellies," "mountain trout," or "whitebait." These little fish run into the rivers each year to spawn. After the brown trout had been there a few years, sea-trout began to appear with the whitebait each year. These sea-trout begin to appear in the spring (September) and, as the season advances the runs contain smaller-sized fish, until towards the end of the season the small fish become quite a nuisance to anglers as they are below the legal size at which they may be retained. From these facts it seems certain that the Tasmanian sea-trout is nothing more than a brown trout which has taken to going to sea every year, and a parallel deduction is natural in classifying our own sea-trout.

Until comparatively recent years it was asserted definitely that salmon do not feed in fresh water. This became so much

an accepted belief that no one seemed to doubt it ; or at any rate no one seemed to have the courage to contradict it. But latterly people have become more observant ; perhaps it is because fish are not so easy to catch as they once were and so people have more time to look about them and observe the habits of fish than they had when so much more of their time was taken up with hooking and landing them. Whatever the causes, we now have a considerable amount of evidence that salmon do feed, though apparently only to a limited extent, during their stay in our rivers. I have myself seen salmon taking small flies from the surface of the water, the salmon's snout appearing in the line of the fly and the fly disappearing before the snout went under again. I have also seen salmon taking minnows ; I have seen a salmon sweep across a shoal of minnows close under my feet and one or more of the little fish disappear from sight into its open jaws. Few people have found anything in the stomach of a salmon ; but this need not necessarily rule out the possibility that it does on occasion feed in fresh water. Few people have ever found anything in the stomach of a snipe ; but no one is going to suggest that a snipe does not feed. The old idea was that it fed " by suction," whatever that may mean ; and from that remarkable statement arose the, to me, disgusting practice of cooking the snipe undrawn.

The same idea prevailed regarding sea-trout, and for that matter still prevails amongst some people. I have seen it stated within the past year or so that sea-trout do not feed in fresh water and that any food taken is ejected again within a very short time. Of course most anglers have seen sea-trout sucking down flies, it is a sight one can witness almost any summer evening just after sunset in rivers frequented by these fish. You see the fly floating down and showing clearly in silhouette against the pale reflected light on the surface of the water ; then a slight bulge appears, the surface of the water breaks, a triangular blunt point sticks out and the fly is gone. The surface of the water rocks in a heavy manner and you know at once that that quiet rise was not from a half-pound trout. Some say that all these flies are ejected ; they say that they have seen the fish do this. An experienced

salmon angler once told me that he had once or twice seen a hooked salmon eject a cloud of whitish matter as it halted for a breather in the pool below his feet. Some say that they have seen sea-trout eject food recently taken. I daresay this is quite true. I have never seen it happen; but that is no reason why I should disbelieve others who say they have. But I have taken sea-trout with food in their stomachs and these fish have not been fresh in from the sea. Quite certainly the insect remains I have found have been taken in the fresh water and not in the sea. A sea-trout taken during a flood will frequently have the remains of food in its stomach. Often this food is not nearly so easy to identify as food found in the stomach of a brown trout. I suggest as an explanation of this that the sea-trout has a very much more powerful and rapid digestion than the brown trout. The snipe again comes handy as a parallel. The usual explanation of the lack of food in a snipe is that it is so rapidly digested that it quickly loses any form. It is much the same with a mole; you will rarely find anything in the stomach of a mole that can be identified, in most cases you will find it quite empty; it is well known that the mole has a very rapid digestion.

I have done quite a lot of observation from the branches of trees. From a tree one can look down and see clearly into quite deep water. One can lie along a good stout limb and be completely hidden from the fish beneath. It is comfortable to lie there in the cool green shade and no wild creatures seem to think of looking up into a tree for a possible human enemy. The brown trout come swimming along doing a regular patrol of all such places; a small insect is taken from the surface, or a caterpillar picked up from the bottom. A sea-trout comes along and behaves in exactly the same manner. If you take a matchbox full of mixed insects along with you into the tree, you can then be quite sure of seeing the fish feed. I have never yet seen a sea-trout disgorge any of the insects it has picked up. Once my son and I watched a sea-trout eating an eel of good size which stuck out some six inches or more on either side of its jaws. It gradually disappeared into the shadows and we were unable to watch the meal to its end, but it seems scarcely reasonable to suppose that it would have

taken the trouble to catch and kill as active and muscular fish as an eel, and to have spent some time in chewing it and shaking the life out of it, merely to spit it out again.

At night sea-trout will readily take a worm. Sometimes they take it with a bang and can be hooked at once ; at other times it is impossible to tell the correct moment at which to strike. Often the bite is so gentle that it can hardly be felt and when this is the case the only thing one can do is to let the fish have it without the slightest check on the line ; it may then travel right across the pool and from time to time you may feel a faint twitch that proves to you that the fish still has hold of some part of the worm. To strike then may produce the heavy pull and hard run of a hooked fish ; or the worm may come away without any check. I am not much nearer a definite opinion as to what one should do than I was twenty or more years ago. But, why do you suppose a sea-trout takes a worm at all if it doesn't intend to eat it ? It seems unreasonable to say that it merely wishes to play with it.

CHAPTER XIII

DRIFTWOOD

1. *The Sunk Nymph*

I SPOTTED them from the bridge; at least a couple of dozen really lovely trout. They were rising in a fairly deep channel under the further bank and could be reached only by wading. The first question was; could I reach them without letting the water go above the tops of my waders? I could see that the bottom was not level right across the river and some of the places looked fairly deep.

I set off across the flats and found that by picking a certain course I could get within reach of the fish.

I fished right through the rise and did not have an offer; though my fly continually passed over steadily rising fish. I tried all the usual varieties that had for several years proved themselves winners up and down the river and, after repeated trials on subsequent occasions, came to the conclusion that the reason why I could not get hold of any of these big fish was that the water was too still for the use of the ordinary fly by ordinary methods.

I thought about these fish a great deal and eventually decided to try what I could do with a slightly weighted fly. I remembered that nearly thirty years earlier I had heard an old South Devon angler recommend a weighted fly for fish that were feeding in very still water.

The next time I went to Station Flats there was no sign of any fish rising; but there were plenty of recurring gusts of wind that broke the surface of the water as they passed over it. I decided to wade out, get into position and put my sunk fly over the place every time the surface was ruffled by the breeze.

My method was to cast, allow the fly to sink, and then draw it towards me by a series of jerks, occasionally allowing it

to sink again. When a fish took, there was no visible rise; just a slight swirl on the surface and not always that. But the fish that took usually took properly and the first indication of a bite was a strong pull. One tightened and then things began to happen at a great pace.

I stayed out there for about two hours and had as fine a catch of trout as I have ever had from the river. I took thirteen fish and very few of them were under half a pound.

2. *Tragedy*

It was a broiling hot afternoon in July and I was standing out in the river putting my fly into the deep shadows under the bushes along the bank and occasionally getting a rise. I did not expect to get many fish under such conditions; but it was very pleasant out there in the quiet with the cool water all around me.

The shadows under the trees were so dark that it was quite impossible to see anything clearly in them. Presently I noticed out of the corner of my eye what I took to be a small party of geese playing about beneath the shade of an oak tree. I had on several previous occasions seen some tame geese in that spot playing a sort of follow-my-leader game in the water beneath the tree. I took no particular notice and went on with my fishing. As I again, a few seconds later, came into position facing the shadow beneath the oak tree, the objects I thought were geese now looked more like a man swimming on his back The boys from the village frequently bathed in the pool; so my supposition seemed quite reasonable. I continued fishing; but my subconscious mind must have continued working on what I had seen, for it suddenly struck me that no man could swim on his back with both his arms and his legs out of water at the same time. I turned quickly and peered intently into the distant black shadow. The object was still there and four flesh-coloured projections (at first thought to have been the necks of geese) waved about above the water. It was neither a flock of geese, nor a man bathing. It was a pig drowning!

I tried to find a channel sufficiently shallow to enable me to go to the pig's assistance; but could not. I dare not try to swim in waders. The only possible course would have been to have got out of the river, crossed the bridge and run down through the orchard. It would have taken me a quarter of an hour at least; but I started to wade back to the shore.

I turned when I had got half way and looked towards the oak tree. The pig had ceased to struggle and was drifting down beneath the bushes. I was too late; it was dead.

But, why worry about a dead pig?

Silly, perhaps; but I was so upset that I could not continue fishing.

3. *The Sunk Nymph Again*

When G.P. told me that he had taken only three sizeable trout from the reservoir since he started renting it, and that he knew there were plenty of fish of a pound and a half weight there, I said that I was sure he must have been using wrong methods and suggested that he should try on a breezy day with a weighted nymph. As he had never tried this method of fishing, he asked me to come along one evening and show him how it was done; so I at once tied up some of the flies I had found so useful on Station Flats. These were very rough affairs, tied on rather large hooks, with thickish bodies and hackles clipped very short—just a few whiskers only to represent short legs. Any shade of dark or reddish brown seems satisfactory with regard to colour. The only troublesome part about making them is tying in the little piece of lead. I have always found this difficult and the difficulty increases as I grow older.

The evening on which G.P. decided to make the attempt happened to be about as bad as regards weather conditions as it very well could be; very warm, still, a clear sky, and the water low and as clear as crystal. However, as the trout had never been angled for before by this method, I thought that there was just a chance that we might get one or two.

The method is to work the fly along in little jerks beneath the surface and the rise is usually indicated by a good swirling

boil; sometimes the bite is felt though no boil is seen. I prefer to get as close to the fish as possible as I can then better judge when it has turned after taking the nymph, which is the proper time to strike. But a close approach on this occasion was quite impossible as all the big trout were rising some distance out from the bank and it was as much as ever I could do to reach the nearest of them.

G.P. found the weighted fly rather difficult to manage and I saw that he made the common mistake of casting harder because the fly was heavier. Actually the action is appreciably slower than in casting with an ordinary fly and less energy is required, as the weight of the fly brings more action out of the rod. He got along better after I had pointed this out to him.

After two hours really hard work I had risen about twenty fish, landed six undersized ones, and touched at least four of the real whoppers, two of which I hooked, but lost as they jumped.

I had felt so confident that I should get one or two of these big fish that I was really disappointed when I had to confess myself beaten.

G.P. says that we must try again when there is a wind. I shall be delighted, as I very much want to prove to him that these big fish can be taken on a fly.

Since this little outing I have discovered that the difficulty of tying in the little piece of lead can be considerably lessened by using raffia and tying this down with the tying silk after the lead has been wrapped over.

4. *Low Water*

As we had had no rain for seven weeks, I knew the river would not be in good order for fishing; but I was tired of working in the garden every evening and wanted to get away by myself for an hour or two. I packed up my fly rod and cycled to the water.

As is my usual custom, I put up the rod out in the meadow before I went to the bank of the stream. I adopted this

habit years ago when I first started fishing for trout. In those days my outings were only occasional and I was so keen to get at the fish that, if I went right to the river bank and saw trout rising whilst I was putting my tackle together, I got so excited that I invariably did something wrong and probably lost my fly and cast in the first fish. So I made it a practice to get everything fixed up and in good order before I looked at the water. On this occasion, when I got sight of the stream, I was so disgusted that I very nearly decided to pack up and go straight back home. The only movement visible was a very thin trickle at the heads of the pools in channels so narrow that one could stride them anywhere. I tried fishing in the first of these little runs and found the greatest difficulty in getting the fly to pitch in the tiny little stream of running water. It really seemed useless to attempt to catch fish. But I felt it would be a pity not to enjoy a few hours by the water and that it would be silly not to make some attempt to catch a trout. I decided that I should have more chance with a big fly; since, by comparison, the gut would be less visible and the splash which I should be bound to make would be more natural with a large fly. I put on a large March Brown and started to search for a fish.

I was rather surprised to find that it was not really difficult to rise fish, provided one kept well below and out of sight. I crept about on the gravel and flicked the fly in under the bushes. If there was a trout anywhere about he usually came rushing along directly the fly hit the water. One unexpected difficulty was that, the water being so very low, the fish made a great wave and swirl as it came towards the fly and it was not at all easy to tell when the fly had been taken. I missed quite a number of fish by being either too early or too late. But it was not long before I had a really good fish on and, after a very exciting battle in the absurdly shallow water, got him into the net and on to the bank.

I had seven trout in just over two hours, which is good work even in the best of conditions on our little stretch of Club water. When I told my friend at the tackle shop about it a few days later he said he would never have believed it possible. He has known the water all his life; whereas I

have not had a regular acquaintance with it for more than a year.

I retained two fish only, as they would be sufficient for breakfast for my wife and myself. I have quite outgrown the desire to make a heavy bag, or to show a quantity of fish on my return; besides, trout are too good as sport-givers to be wantonly sacrificed; and it seems to me that, with their increasing scarcity, every angler should do his utmost to discourage the practice of killing more fish than are reasonably required as a little delicacy.

I have since heard of a visiting angler to this water who took and retained thirty-five trout in one day. Either he must have been an extraordinarily clever angler, or conditions favourable to fishing must have been exceptional. In any case the action was quite inexcusable; this number of fish is far more than most of the Club members get in one season. I shall certainly press that a limit is fixed and suggest six as ample for anyone on one day.

5. *Disappointment*

When one lives four miles from the river the question of what rod and tackle to take is always more or less a gamble. If you have a car, it doesn't make much difference; you can just chuck a bagful of assorted tackle on to the back seat, put in minnow rod and fly rod, and off you go. But when you have to carry all of it on a push-bike, up and down hills and over roughish roads, you cut down your equipment to a minimum.

It rained pretty heavily a couple of days ago; but that may not mean much down here within reach of the tide. If no rain had fallen upstream, the height and colour of the water would not have been affected in the slightest. However, the chances seemed more in favour of some colour in the river; so I took the minnow-spinning outfit.

Everything seemed just right when I got to the river. The water was slightly higher than normal and with just enough colour in it to fade out the bottom at anything beyond a foot depth. I had thought of again trying a favourite old minnow

of dull copper. Two or three years ago it was the only minnow I would use ; but since then I have got into the habit of using a Silver Devon in this murky tidal water. As soon as I saw the water I decided to stick to the Silver Devon.

My first step into the water nearly ended in disaster ; for I put my foot on a round pebble about the size of a football and nearly went headlong. After a tremendous struggle I managed to recover my balance ; but I also had to suspend operations for a second or two in order to recover from a sharp prod of lumbago brought about by my struggles to keep on my feet.

Having recovered my foothold and my physical ease, I started spinning in the stickle before me. At the second cast there was a slight pull and I was surprised to find that what I had taken to be a six-inch trout was a peal of about a pound and a half. But the connection was short-lived ; a swirl in the running water, a quick leap into the air, and my minnow hung slack.

But this was a good beginning. I was glad I had decided on the minnow tackle. I felt that I was in for a grand bit of sport. I went on casting and working down towards the tail of the pool. Within ten minutes I saw a heavy swirl behind the minnow and the dark grey back of an even larger peal that had come at the bait but missed it. I tried the same spot again ; but spinning slower. As this fish refused to come again, I moved down a couple of yards and at once ran another smaller fish. Nothing further happened in this pool ; so I moved to the next stickle.

This next place is a long and rather swift run, with steady water under the opposite bank. I have always looked upon it as an ideal spot for peal ; but I know very little about the river yet and can only go on the look of a place and this is often very deceptive. This long run provided nothing.

I thought that by this time the first pool would have recovered sufficiently to make it worth while trying it again. I did not get an offer until I had nearly reached the spot where the second fish had run at me, and here another swirled behind the bait but missed it. I do not think that this was either of the fish that I had moved when first I came down to the pool.

I now walked upstream to the tail of a rather still pool that tapered off into a sharp run about four feet deep. Here a peal of quite two pounds snapped at the minnow, turned, leaped and was free.

Next a trout of about half a pound dashed off the shallows close in and made two half-hearted attempts at taking the bait ; but its courage failed it on each occasion and it would not show again.

At the tail of this run another peal, the sixth, swirled at the minnow but missed it. This fish also refused any further offers.

I had now fished out all the moving water in that part of the river and to reach tne next stickle would have necessitated a walk of nearly half a mile. I thought of the long journey home and decided that it would not be wise to tire myself unduly.

I turned to one of the pools and fished it carefully all over. I saw one flash of yellow as a trout turned at the minnow close to the bank ; but that was all.

As I walked slowly back to the road I confess I felt somewhat disappointed at the results of my evening's effort and began to wonder if I had really been as wise as I had at first thought in bringing the spinning rod ; perhaps the fish would have taken a fly properly and not merely dabbed at it, as they did, in most cases, at the minnow.

But, when I reached home and put away my rod, I realized that I had at any rate learnt a great deal regarding the positions taken up by the peal in this stretch of water. This knowledge may be of very great value to me some day. As a very expert peal angler once said to me, " Half the battle with peal fishing is to know where the fish lie. When you have found that out, it is only a matter of putting a fly over them without yourself being seen." Actually it isn't quite as easy as all that ; but with this knowledge you do at any rate know where you may expect a fish and where it is almost a waste of time to try.

6. *End of the Season*

Many anglers seem to consider that the trout fishing season is practically over by the end of June. I admit that July

and August are usually very poor months for trouting; but September is quite a different matter and towards the end of the month, often when there are only a few more days of the season left, I have at times found that I have done as well as at any time. On several occasions my last basket taken in the last week of September has been the best in quality for the whole season. One reason for the free rising of trout at this time of the year is, I believe, that they are all moving upstream in preparation for spawning and are therefor out of their regular surroundings. Many of these fish have remained in one spot during the whole of the rest of the season and have learnt how to distinguish the movements of a fly attached to a gut cast from one that is floating naturally. They have been pricked and so have learnt to be cautious in what they take. But it probably does not occur to them that the hooked flies that tormented them elsewhere can follow them into another part of the river; consequently they will often rise as fearlessly as they did in March or April.

When I suggested to a friend that we should try the local Club water he was not at first very enthusiastic. He said that he knew there would be very little water and he very much doubted if we should get a fish; but, as he could suggest nothing better, he consented to come.

He was quite right with regard to the water; I have never seen a river so low. In some places the little channel of running water at the head of a pool was so small that it was extremely difficult to get a fly to fall on it. However, the wind sprang up and there were sharp showers about; so I did not feel unduly despondent. We separated and I decided to withhold my hand and fish only when the pools were ruffled either by wind or rain.

On a calm day, with the water in the state it was then, I doubt if one would have had one rise in an hour; but, by fishing only when the surface was disturbed, I found I could get rises in water quite devoid of any current. When we met again for refreshment we found that we each had one good trout and had returned several that were above the local limit, though not quite up to our standard.

After a rest we both started again fishing upstream,

over-lapping each other so that each had unfished water to try in.

We had each caught another sizeable fish, when we noticed the water rising slightly and getting smoky in colour. I anticipated that this would bring the fish well on the feed. Actually they became much more reluctant to rise and, though we each added a trout or two to our basket, the fish were distinctly less eager than they had been hitherto.

I had my last fish on the way home, as we were walking along the banks of a feeder to a laundry. The water was now quite coloured and running rather swiftly. I saw this fish rise, cast over the spot, and at once connected. Shortly after this I saw two more fish rise further down the feeder; but neither of these would come to my fly.

Though this was not a record day for either of us for this particular water this season, it was within two of my record and a very satisfactory outing considering the weather and water conditions.

Some people object to fishing for trout in September because the fish in their streams are by then full of spawn. Most of the fish in our water have only just started making spawn by the end of this month. Most of the fish also are in very much better condition then than they would be in the early part of the season and up to the middle of April; in fact, I very rarely start trout fishing until April is well in. The argument that you are catching would-be spawners is of course absurd; you are catching would-be spawners whatever time of the year you take them. If any local alterations were made in the season, I should prefer to see the close time extended to the end of March; the trout would then have had time to get into reasonable condition after the lean winter months.

7. *Was It Worth It?*

A man somewhat over middle age stepped out of the train at the riverside station, complete with rod, net and waders. "Going to get one to-night?" asked the porter-stationmaster-ticket-collector as he relieved him of half his ticket.

"I don't know," replied the angler. "Your last train goes too early at this time of the year for the peal. Twenty minutes is about all one can get, and that only in the shadows. But I may get a trout; though there is hardly enough water for them to swim in. Don't let the train go without me, will you?"

"I'll ring the bell if you aren't here when she comes in."

The river ran about two hundred yards from the station and the distance from the nearest pool by the footpath and along the road was perhaps a quarter of a mile. That was the place he intended to fish when dusk fell. But it was no use trying it so early in the evening; so the angler walked up the meadows and fished a stretch of rougher water higher up.

The trout were not rising. He tried two or three streamy bits without result. Then, as it began to get dusk, he returned to the big pool. He changed his cast to one slightly heavier and with a larger fly, in the hopes of getting a peal from beneath the trees on the opposite bank.

At the tail of the pool was an island, from the upstream end of which one could reach the deeper water beneath the opposite bank. The angler waded out carefully on to the shallows at the head of the island and began to cast under the bank. Nothing happened. He looked at his watch; the train would be due in ten minutes. A few more casts at the tail of the pool in the hopes of changing his luck. At last came a mighty tug and, as the fish rushed off upstream, a whistle sounded as the train came round the bend about half a mile away. Could he do it? He put on all the pressure he dared; but the fish was heavy and active. He heard the train steam into the station and heard the porter ring his bell. One last effort and he had slipped the net under the fish. No time to stop to take out the hook. He floundered across the shallows, falling once and getting a good soaking down one leg as the water came in over the tops of his waders. Then out into the meadow. He began to shout, "Hi! Hi!" as he staggered along. Running in waders is not an easy job for a man past fifty. At length an answering shout came, "All right, sir. Hurry up!" He blundered on to the platform with his rod still up. He was gasping for breath. Perspiration dripped from his brow

and water from his clothes. "Was it worth it?" said the porter with a grin as he opened the carriage door.

"I think so," replied the angler, holding up his net in which still kicked a trout of a pound and a half. "But I wish it had been a peal."

The passengers gaped. They had been for their usual Saturday night at the Pictures and could not understand what pleasure anyone could find in going to such exertion to get a fish of a size one could buy for a shilling. But they were not anglers and even men of fifty and over can put up with a lot of discomfort and disappointment for an occasional grand thrill.

The angler looked along the carriage. Every seat was occupied. He felt he must sit down somewhere in order to kill and unhook his fish, and to take down his rod. There was a little tip-up seat in the space between this carriage and the next. He went to it, threw it down and sat. But he had forgotten to hold it down. He landed heavily on the floor and the whole carriage rocked with laughter. It was not very dignified for a man of some local professional importance.

. . . . .

Yes, I was the angler.

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